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Highlighting Common Difficulties Encountered by English as a Foreign

Language Learners in Learning English Idioms:

The Case of Master Students at Biskra University.

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Declaration

I, Hanine MAHBOUB do hereby declare that the present work is the product of my own efforts. It is my original work that has not been submitted nor published beforehand by any individual, university, or institution for any degree. All the previously published works used in this research are rightfully acknowledged through citations and references. This research was conducted and completed at Mohamed Kheider University, Biskra, Algeria.

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Dedication

To those who, in spite of everything, still choose Goodness...

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Primarily, praise to Allah, Lord of all creation, the Merciful and the Compassionate, for guiding me, lighting my path
and granting me the patience and strength to accomplish this work.

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Abstract

Language learning has always focused on teaching the forms and the structures of language; on the other hand, formulaic language generally and idioms specifically have not got their real value. English as a foreign language learners (EFL) often suffering when dealing with such English idiomatic expressions. It is for this reason that this study was worth undertaking as it aimed at highlighting the students' common difficulties when dealing with idioms and their implemented strategies, as well as implicitly examining the way these expressions are taught. For the achievement of this qualitative study, following the case study design, a semi-structured questionnaire was conducted with 20 master students, including first- and second-year students, in addition to two interviews with the teachers in charge of the language mastery class at the Department of English Language and Literature in Biskra University. The findings revealed that students face many difficulties in the process of learning and understanding idioms, the main ones were: the lack of cultural background, the lack of exposure, the absence of context. It was further demonstrated that students used a variety of strategies, namely relying on the context, finding equivalents, memorisation and others. And finally, it is worth to note that there was a kind of inadequacy in the adopted teaching methods.

Keywords: English idioms, Idioms' difficulties, Idioms' strategies, EFL learners

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

EFL: English as a Foreign Language.

FEIs: Fixed Expressions Including Idioms.

L1: First Language.

L2: Second Language.

APA: The American Psychological Association.

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General Introduction

1. Background of the Study

Language learning has always been linked to a good knowledge of grammatical rules and a certain lexical bank of basic vocabulary items; hence, all what matters is the student getting his/her idea across. On the other hand, native speakers of English do not always use direct literal meanings in their conveyed messages, and foreign language learners need to be linguistically and culturally competent, as well as being able to understand those intended meanings and making inferences, as "the person who learns language without learning culture risks becoming a fluent fool" (Bennett, Bennett & Allen, 2003, p. 237). Thus, it is important to know that these lexical items, including idioms are among those complex vocabulary items that represent the naturalness of language, language as used, and not language as it is in articles and dictionaries, and therefore, English idioms came to prove their effectiveness in the process of language learning. According to the Oxford dictionary an idiom "can be the language of a people or country" (as cited in Cacciari & Tabossi, 1993, p. xi).

English idioms are used by native speakers to transmit the messages in a more concrete and a colourful way. Idioms often carry a figurative meaning that cannot be understood by a literal interpretation of their constituent words. Thus, idioms are challenging in nature yet interesting as stated by the Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic Expressions "Familiarity with a wide range of idiomatic expressions and the ability to use them appropriately in context are among the distinguishing marks of a native-like command of English" Cowie & Mackin (as cited in Irujo, 1986, p. 236).

Apart from this, idioms are part of language as well as culture, what made them widely used by native speakers whether in their spoken discourse or even the written one. However, it has always been challenging for foreign language learners to deal with these idiomatic expressions whether in understanding or using them appropriately in different contexts. It is

for this reason that this study will be of a great significance as it seeks to understand and highlight the difficulties encountering EFL learners in learning English idioms.

2. Statement of the Problem

During the last academic year as a master EFL students at Biskra University, we have observed that students face many challenges in a language mastery class, especially being exposed for the first time to such a course, mainly when dealing with English idioms; where some students have never even heard of that term before. The pragmatic nature and the way idioms have been taught is what impeded us the most as EFL learners from learning them in an effective way.

These idiomatic expressions which often carry a non-literal meaning were most of the time avoided to be used by EFL students; however, they cannot actually be ignored because of their significance and frequency of use in both, spoken and written discourse, especially by native speakers. For this, it is highly important to EFL students to learn and to be made aware of English idioms that help them to be more competent, confident and have a native-like command of language. And due to the undeniable relationship between idioms, culture and foreign language learning, learning idioms becomes a necessity and not a choice.

In contrast to native speakers, whose everyday language focuses largely on using idioms as a mean of conveying their messages in a more vivid and colourful way, EFL learners at Biskra University are afraid of using them outside or even inside the classroom. And it is for this reason that investigating the difficulties encountered by EFL learners in learning English idioms is worth undertaking.

3. The Research Questions

This research seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the difficulties encountered by EFL learners in learning English idioms?

RQ2: What are the strategies used by EFL students in the process of learning idioms?

RQ3: Does the way idioms are taught contribute to their learning' difficulty?

5. The Research Aims

The general aim of this study seeks to highlight the difficulties encountered by master EFL students in learning English idioms at the Department of English at Biskra University.

More specifically, this research work aims to:

- Look at the different strategies used by EFL students to facilitate the process of learning English idioms

- Examine the way idioms are taught in EFL classrooms.

6. The Research Methodology for this Study

For this research project, the researcher will adopt a Qualitative Approach as the nature of the study requires. Thus, a Case Study Design will be implemented to get the desirable results since it is compatible with the process of investigating and highlighting EFL students' difficulties in learning English idioms.

As for the data collection methods, two data collection methods will take place in this study. A semi-structured questionnaire will be distributed to students to bring out the difficulties encounter EFL students in learning idioms, as well as the most frequent strategies used. The third section of the questionnaire attempts to examine students' satisfaction on the course delivery and how they would like the course to be delivered. Besides the semi-structured questionnaire, the researcher will be using a semi-structured interview with teachers. The teachers contributing to the interview are those in charge of the language mastery class, and the aim is to have a clear idea on the way they teach idioms to their students, their students' idiomatic competency and whether the time devoted to idioms' learning is enough to make their students familiar with these idiomatic expressions, as well as their students' difficulties and implemented strategies in learning English idioms.

7. Population and sampling technique:

Master EFL students in the department of English at Biskra University for the academic year 2021/2022 represent the population for this study because they best suit it, since they have been exposed to English for four years at university which make them more competent, in addition they have been familiar with idioms since idioms take part in the syllabus of a language mastery course. Among master students, 20 students are going to be used as a sample, following the Convenience Sampling technique.

8. Significance of the Study

This study will serve to gain more insights into the process of learning English idioms for English as foreign language learners. More importantly, to highlight the difficulties that face EFL learners when dealing with idioms in classroom. Moreover, the study seeks to examine the strategies used by EFL learners so that the learning process of idioms will be easier for them. It also attempts to investigate the way in which idioms are taught and delivered in the classroom. Apart from this, it is worth to mention that this research will be of a great contribution to the field of English language teaching, mainly in the Algerian context, as it helps students to improve their idiomatic competency by suggesting solutions to overcome those difficulties. It also assists syllabus designers to shed more light on the significance of English idioms in the field of language teaching and design a course according to the students' needs that better suit them.

9. The Referencing Style for this Dissertation

Taking into consideration that this research work belongs to the field of social sciences and humanities, it follows the American Psychological Association (APA) style referencing, 6th edition. However, it is important to note that some details are made according to the supervisor's instructions like the cover page and the justifying option.

10. Structure of the Dissertation

The present study will be divided into three chapters. In **the first chapter**, the researcher will theoretically discuss the first variable that is learning idioms and some basic concepts. However, within **the second chapter** she will deal with idioms in relation to the foreign language learner and highlight the difficulties that face EFL learners in the process of learning idioms. And finally, **the third chapter** represents the practical part of this research work, known as the fieldwork, were the data obtained through the questionnaires and the interviews are going to be analysed and discussed.

10. Demystifying Terminology/Glossary

A number of terms require some elucidation to determine how and in which sense the researcher uses them.

Idioms: idioms are expressions used by native speakers to convey their messages in a more concrete and vivid way, and they are specific to each language and culture in which their deep meaning is different from their surface meaning.

Surface Meaning: surface meaning of an idiom means the literal interpretation of an idiom by referring and translating each word separately.

Deep Meaning: in this context, deep meaning of an idiom refers to its non-literal meaning. In other words, it is the meaning of an expression as a whole, apart from the meaning of its constituent words each alone.

Transparent Idioms: a category of idioms in which its figurative meaning is similar or can be derived from its literal meaning or the parts constituting the whole expression.

Opaque Idioms: opaque idioms are among the categories of idioms that mean the literal meaning of the expression has nothing to do with its figurative meaning.

Decomposable Idioms: they are referred to as analyzable idioms as well, in which their figurative meaning is similar or close to their literal meaning.

Chapter One: Idioms: An Overview

Introduction

This chapter intends to give a clearer image of the first variable in this study, that is idiomatic expressions. The researcher will start by providing some definitions on idioms, as well as their characteristics or the needed features that allow an expression to be labeled an idiom. Moreover, the classification of idioms will be provided, and how different researchers have come to classify idioms each in his proper way. It also attempts to highlight the theories of idioms' comprehension in the first language and the role of context in the recognition of idioms. Finally, the chapter will also tackle the importance of learning idioms for foreign language learners.

1.1 Definition of Formulaic Language

Formulaic language, also called formulaic sequences, is considered to be as ready-made expressions, being it a word or a phrase. They are stored whole in memory and retrieved when needed or at the moment of using them. One definition that properly summarises what formulaic language is, is that of Wray and Perkins:

> a sequence, continuous or discontinous, of words or other meaning elements, which is, or appears to be, prefabricated: that is, stored and retrieved whole from memory at the time of use, rather than being subject to generation or analysis by the language grammar (Wray & Perkins, 2000, p.1).

Formulaic language encompasses different and various types of word-string or multiword units that might undergo some changes depending on the context in which they take place. Among these multiword units: collocations, phrasal verbs, proverbs, idioms...etc.

1.2 Some Definition of idioms

Idioms have gained more attention lately, as the appropriate use of these expressions permits second language learners to have a native-like command of English. Idioms are

expressions specific to each language, used by native speakers in their spoken and written discourse whether in a formal or an informal way. The linguistic repertoire of people is full of these idiomatic conventionalized expressions which seems to be influenced by the following rule ''speak idiomatically unless there is some good reason not to do it'' (Searle, 1975). Many researchers have defined idioms almost the same way:

According to Irujo (1986) ''idioms are conventionalized expressions whose meaning cannot be determined from the meaning of its parts'' (p. 288). This is quite similar to what Larson (1984, p.20) has stated ''a string of words whose meaning is different from the meaning conveyed by the individual word.''

For the Longman dictionary of ContemporaryEnglish (2012, p. 870) ''an idiom is a group of words that has special meaning that is different from the ordinary meaning of each separate word''. Similarly, the Webster dictionary defined idioms as ''an expression whose meaning cannot be predicted from the usual meaning of its constituent elements.''

Another definition by Cain, Oakhil and Lemmon (2005) ''an idiom is a figurative expression that usually can be interpreted literally but that takes a non-literal meaning when used in a specific context'' (p.66). This is not that much different from the way Alexander (1987, p.187) defined idioms ''multiword units which have to be learned as a whole, along with associated sociolinguistic, cultural and pragmatic rule of use.''

Based on the above mentioned definitions, one can say that idioms are type of multiword expressions peculiar to each language, produced by natives and carry both, literal and figurative meanings. The figurative meaning of an idiom cannot be interpreted by a literal translation of its parts, without referring to the sentence as a whole and the context in which the sentence takes place.

1.3 Characteristics of Idioms

It is undeniable that idioms had been treated as dead and frozen metaphors. While the former refers to the origins of an idiom and the arbitrary meanings they carry, that had been overlooked. The latter refers to the notion that idioms are thought to be fixed in form with little freedom left for variations and transformations. This view has been challenged by a number of scholars who believed that idioms are neither dead nor frozen and may receive some changes.

As Mäntylä (2004) mentioned in her master dissertation, there are several elements which might differ in terms of their degree of importance but are still critical and must be taken into consideration as they are needed in the process of labeling an expression as an idiom or not.

1.3.1 Metaphoricity

Metaphoricity appears to be a fundamental feature of an idiom. It is often used interchangeably with the term figurativeness in many studies. Lakoff (as cited in Mäntylä, 2004). Moreover, according to Mäntylä (2004), there are different levels of figurativeness. Idioms are usually divided into three categories depending on the extent to which the figurative meaning of an idiom is related and can be detected from the literal interpretation of its constituent parts. These categories can be classified and explained as the following:

Transparent idioms: are expressions in which their figurative meaning in clearly linked and almost identical to the literal meaning of an idiom. Semi-transparent idioms: are expressions where the constituent elements or the literal meaning give some cues about the figurative meaning to be figured out, but with less clear and precise relationships as in the case of transparent idioms. Opaque idioms: are when the surface and the deep meaning of an expression have nothing to do with each other. That is to say, the literal meaning does not contribute to the understanding of the figurative meaning of the idiom but rather needs referring to the etymologies of words.

The challenge metaphoricity imposes is that it relies much more on the judgement of the individual. And as people are different, this creates sometimes similar images and sometimes different images of an idiom in their minds depending on the way they have made associations. Another challenge is that at times an idiom carries the literal meaning depending on the context and not the figurative one. This in turn makes the understanding of idioms and getting the intended meaning even harder (Cacciari, 1993).

Metaphoricity has been linked to ambiguity but Moon (1998, p. 187) claims that context solves the problem. This claim was criticised by Mäntylä as she said that even if the context often helps, it is not everything. She argues that ambiguity of idioms is rather linked to their polysemy. Furthermore, she adds that context may assist in telling the addressee that not the literal meaning which is needed but cannot tell him/her which metaphorical meaning of the possible interpretations is the intended one. Moon (1998) also added that the level of familiarity of idioms contribute to their ambiguity even when the context is provided. Context can lead to false interpretations due to the unfamiliarity of idioms. Even familiar idioms can cause ambiguity since people receive different idioms in different ways with different interpretations as stated previously.

1.3.2 Analysability/ Non-compositionality

Analysaility is a key feature in the process of understanding and the comprehension of idioms (Gibbs, 1993). For Pulman (1993), analysability refers to idioms that can be divided into parts, with each part contributing to building the metaphorical meaning of the whole.

Decompositionality has often been referred to as idioms being dead, that is the meanings of idioms being treated as arbitrary rather than figurative. This means there is no relationship between the image created by the literal meaning and the figurative meaning of idioms. However, idioms that might at first appear totally non-transparent or opaque, their image does reflect their non-literal meaning in fact. This can be observed once the meaning of an idiom is

worked out, thus the link between the image and the figurative meaning is now clear (Keysar and Bly, 1999, pp. 1575-1576).

Pulman (1993) argued that totally opaque idioms have less tolerance for variations and transformations. However, many idioms that are considered non-transparent nowadays are in fact analyzable to people at earlier time. According to Cacciari (1993), idioms differ and they are not homogeneous, thus the generalization of a certain feature (e.g. analyzability) can be problematic.

1.3.3 Fixedness of Form

Fixedness, also known as frozenness or stability is another crucial feature of idioms. That is, idioms being rigid and have no tolerance for variance and are not open for any modifications. According to Pulman, (1993) and McGlone (1994) even though many idiomatic expressions seem to be fixed and reject any kind of transformation in their form, meaning and context; many other idioms are open to variance whether in their grammar, vocabulary and even context.

This concept of fixedness has been challenged by Moon (1998, p. 111) who claimed that ''very large number of FEIs (Fixed Expressions Including Idioms) do not have fixed forms, and it would be wrong to claim that they do.'' He referred to kick the bucked as a matter of an example. The latter has often been treated as an idiom being completely frozen in terms of its lexis. In contrast to Newmeyer (as cited in Moon, 1998) who stated that kick the pail does not carry the same meaning of kick the bucket. Moon has been encountered by both kick the pail and kick the can, carrying the same meaning as kick the bucket in real text. In this respect Moon (1998, p. 111) said that ''stability and frozenness can never be assumed, and change over time.'' This goes hand in hand with Mäntylä's claim (2004, p.35) ''as language changes, also idiom variations change.''

Objections to Moon's claim of fixedness took place. For Stock, Slack & Ortony (as cited in Mäntylä, 2004) lexical variance is still limited and rare and the individual does not have the total freedom to choose the words to substitute with which others. Thus, even though lexical variation is limited, it does exist; especially with the individuals' creativity when inventing and changing certain items to better suit a particular situation. Fernando suggested that transformable idioms ''may be modified by various transformational operations, addition, permutation, substitution, and deletion. In each case, the conventional meaning is varied adding to the interpretative effort on the part of the addressee'' (Mäntylä, 2004, p. 35).

Yet, such transformations may change the meaning of an expression or at least the nuances an expression has (Mäntylä, 2004). This in turn makes the process more difficult as variability adds to the difficulty of understanding and interpreting idioms not only for second language learners but even for native speakers. However, Gibbs, Nandini& Cutting (1989) propose that processing variations is not that difficult unless the meaning of the original metaphor is not kept or when the substituted words lead the expression to convey a totally new meaning. Swinney and Cutler (as cited in Mäntylä, 2004) claim that the lexical status of an idiom increases as it becomes more fixed. Therefore, idioms open to variations are less likely to be recognised and memorized in their different forms and the situations in which they take place.

1.3.4 Level of Formality

Idioms are often considered informal and more likely to appear in spoken discourse rather than the written one. This is not totally wrong but idioms still take part in written discourse and slightly formal texts. Moon (1998) gave the example of newspapers, as journalists and reporters often use idioms especially in their headlines which help in arousing interest and the readers' attention to carry on reading.

In Mäntylä's study (2004), the author reported on Strässler's analysis of transcripts of therapy sessions, trials and White House discussions. He found out that even in formal settings, idioms were not avoided at hundred percent and were still used in the conversations but not as much as he was expecting.

Strässler further pointed out that unlike trials and therapy sessions where the use of idioms was kept to minimum, probably because of the institutional setting. White House transcripts were full of idioms, mainly due to one person, low in hierarchy and who enjoyed using idioms.

He also noticed the presence of idioms with the third person and when describing an object rather than when talking about participants in a speech event.

Mäntylä, on the other hand, emphasized that in relation to the level of formality, is the link between idioms and context or register. In this respect, Mäntylä argues that the style and the context of idioms should be given much attention. Stock et al (as cited in Mäntylä) adds that the meanings of idioms are most of the time oversimplified and took the example of kick the bucket which is usually interpreted as "to die'', when it actually means ''dying by natural causes and relatively suddenly''. That is why context and register ought to be taken into account since idioms are rarely neutral and this in return adds to their difficulty.

1.3.5 Multi-word Expressions

Idioms are expressions composed of more than one single word. According to Alexander (1987, p. 187) idioms are ''multiword units which have to be learned as a whole, along with associated sociolinguistic, cultural and pragmatic rule of use.'' In fact, it was not much said in regard to this characteristic other than it is essential.

However, questions were raised to decide on when to name an expression an idiom. Some questions were: whether a prepositional phrase can be considered as an idiom such as *in bloom* (Moon, 1998) since it contains only two words. What is the relationship between multi-

wordiness and figurativeness? Is there a maximum length for an expression, so that it can be named an idiom? What is role of similes? And is any multi-word expression that carries a metaphorical meaning is in fact an idiom?

What can be said in regard to these questions, is that what decides on whether an expression is an idiom or not; is not the extent to which a certain characteristic is there but rather the presence of all the characteristics at once in a single expression, namely: multi-wordiness, metaphoricity, the degree of analyzability, fixedness of form and the level of formality, all together.

1.4 Classification of Idioms

Many researchers differed on the way idioms should be classified, this why is why there was more than one classification provided for idiomatic expressions. Fernando (1996), Mäntylä (2004), Glucksberg (1991) and Kvetko (2009) are among the researchers who provided their own classification of idioms.

According to Fernando (as cited in Strakšienė, 2009), idioms are classified into three sub-classes, namely pure idioms, semi-idioms and literal idioms. He referred to pure idioms as ''a type of conventionalized, non-literal multiword expression'' (as cited in Strakšienė, 2009, p. 14). That is, literal meaning having nothing to do with overall figurative meaning. Fernando adds that this type of idioms is considered to be opaque, accepting no or little variation. Semi-idioms are partially opaque having one non-literal with one or more literal constituents. As for literal idioms, they are also invariable or allow little transformation. They are transparent in the sense that the literal translation contributes to the overall metaphorical meaning. In this regard, Cacciari (1991, pp. 46-47) stated that ''the literal meaning of the transparent idiom string is highly related to string's figurative meaning. ...For such idioms there should be little if any difference between an image of the literal meaning and an image of the figurative meaning.''

The way Fernando classified idioms is quite similar to the way idioms had been classified by Mäntylä (2004) and Glucksberg (1991). Nevertheless, they referred to them differently. For Mäntylä she classified them respectively as opaque, semi-transparent and transparent idioms. On the other hand, Glucksberg classified them as follow: non-compositional, compositional-opaque and compositional-transparent idioms. However, he suggested a fourth sub-class that is the quasi-metaphorical type. The latter refers to idioms conveying meanings through their allusional content by characterising a situation as an instance of that particular concept.

In respect to how Fernando, Mäntylä and Glucksberg classified idioms, Glucksberg (2001) properly summarised the notion of classifying idioms based on their degree of transparency and opacity. He said:

In non-compositional idioms, no relations between the idiom's constituents and the idiom's meaning can be discerned, as in the idiom cheesecake to refer to pinup art [...]. In partially compositional idioms, some relationships between an idiom's constituents and its idiomatic meaning can be discerned and exploited. Although one could not infer the meaning to die from the literal meaning of kick the bucket, the idiom's literal meaning does constrain its use and comprehension. [...] In fully compositional idioms, the constituents map directly onto their idiomatic referents, as in the idiom pop the question (as cited in Kovàcs, 2016, p. 89).

Kvetko, another researcher who classified idioms into different classes: One based on the idioms' opacity, one from a semantic point of view and one based their construction. In his first classification, he divided it into three sub-categories, exactly as the above-mentioned researchers categorised idioms, with assigning different names for each sub-category. He referred to them respectively as pure/ demotivated idioms, also known as phraseological fusions, semi-opaque/ partially motivated idioms and finally semi-transparent/ semi-idioms.

However, for his second classification, he categorised idioms in terms of their fixedness of form; varying from those allowing no transformations and those open to variation. Among changeable idioms, Kvekto distinguished these possible variations, namely, grammatical variations, lexical variations, orthographic variations and finally geographic variations which might include any of the first three variations or all of them at once.

In the third classification that is based on idioms' construction, he broke them down into verbal, verbless, sentence and nominal idioms. Verbal idioms consist of verbal syntagmatic structures (e.g., make up one's mind). For verbless idioms they consist of verbless syntagmatic structures (e.g., black sheep), sentence idioms (e.g. talk of the devil, the coast is clear) and nominal idioms consisting of at least one word (e.g. by short, of course).

Kvetko further added that idiomatic expressions can be categorised according to their type of irregularities. That is, idioms with irregular form and clear meaning (e.g. hold true, go one better), idioms with regular form and an unclear meaning (e.g. burn the candle at both ends) and last, idioms with both form and meaning logically strange (anomalous) (e.g. be neck and neck, by and large).

As it was already noticed, many researchers came to classify idioms differently. However, for Fernando, Mäntylä and Glucksberg, they only differed in the names they assigned to each category; unlike Kovàcs who provided four classifications that are a way different from the other researchers, except for his first classification that was based on the degree of idioms' opacity and transparency.

1.5 Theories in L1 Comprehension of idioms

According to Cooper (1999), there are four models that were proposed to explain the way native speakers of English understand idioms, namely: the idiom list-hypothesis, the lexical representation hypothesis, the direct access hypothesis and finally is the composition model.

1.5.1 The Idiom List Hypothesis

According to Babrow and Bell (1973), the idiom list-hypothesis refers to natives first processing idioms literally then figuratively. However, if the literal interpretation does not correspond to the meaning in which the idiomatic expression takes place, the speaker tries to find the intended meaning in a special mental lexicon and identifies the assigned figurative meaning. Nevertheless, this model has been criticized and rejected stating that the metaphorical meaning of idioms is worked out as fast as literal expressions (Cacciari, 1999).

1.5.2 The Lexical Representation Hypothesis

The second model which is the lexical representation hypothesis was suggested by Swinney and Cutler. This model claims that idioms are long words string stored with other different forms of words all together in the mental lexicon. Moreover, this hypothesis involves a simultaneous processing of both literal and figurative meaning. And then, the most appropriate meaning is chosen based on the context in which the sentence is situated, unlike the list-hypothesis which believes that literal meaning is processed before the metaphorical one (cacciari, 1999).

1.5.3 The Direct Access Hypothesis

A third model is the direct access hypothesis by Gibbs (Cacciari, 1999) which is similar to the lexical representation but it is more developed, in the sense that a native speaker directly restores the figurative meaning from the mental lexicon, paying little attention to the literal meaning. In other terms, a native speaker very seldom considers the literal meaning. This is quite similar to what Glucksberg (1993, p. 5) has reported ''idiom access will be completed more quickly because it does not require the lexical, syntactic, and semantic processing required for full linguistic analysis. Thus, familiar idioms will be understood more quickly than comparable literal expressions.'' Furthermore, it has been claimed that a native speaker does not need to translate the literal meaning of a familiar idiom in order to find out its metaphorical

meaning (Gibbs, 1980). Moreover, Gibbs posited that the conventionality of an idiom adds to the extent to which an idiomatic expression can be easily comprehended.

1.5.4 The Composition Model

The last model, the composition model by (Gibbs, 1994; Tabossi & Zardon, 1995) took the place of the other three theories mentioned above. However, it was first suggested by Gibbs, Nayak & cutting (1989) in a series of reading-time experiments where participants were asked to decide whether a certain string of words constituted a meaningful English expression.

The participants have processed analysable idioms more quickly than non-decomposable idioms. That is, idioms in which their constituent parts contribute to the overall figurative meaning of an expression were easier to process than those their figurative meaning cannot be derived from their individual components. In this respect, Gibbs (1984) stated that:

> People attempt to do some decompositional analysis when understanding idiomatic phrases. When an idiom is decomposable, readers can assign independent meanings to its individual parts and will quickly recognize how these meaningful parts combine to form the overall figurative interpretation of the phrase (As cited in Cooper 1999, p. 236).

Generally speaking, it is further stated that in the composition model, people do not inhibit their usual steps in the language-processing mode when facing an idiomatic expression. However, they use their syntactic parser, lexical processor and semantic analysis in order to process an idiomatic phrase, as any other phrase.

1.6 The Effect of Context on Idioms' Comprehension and Interpretation

Many studies tackled the role of context in the recognition of the intended meaning, being it a word, a proverb or an idiom. It is believed that context is one of the main strategies used in working out the meaning of an idiomatic expression and in facilitating the comprehension and the recognition of these idiomatic expressions.   However, studies investigating the role of context in understanding the process of idiom comprehension and

getting the conveyed meaning were controversial; varying from those claiming that context has a crucial and undeniable role in working out the meaning, and those claiming context having less effective significance.

In Nippold's study (1989) with adolescents, investigating the interpretation of idioms in isolation versus in context, he found out that context adds to the accuracy of answers. On the other hand, accuracy decreases with idioms presented in isolation. In other terms, he argued that context adds to the ease of interpreting idioms; on the contrary, idioms presented out of context are more difficult to comprehend. Furthermore, Nippold's study, which was conducted with 475 adolescents ranging from 14 to 17, further revealed that both young and older students made errors, but errors tend to decrease as subject age increased. However, even older students had not yet mastered the task, whether in the isolation or in the context modes. In the same vein, he stated that ''it is the complex and subtle nature of later language development that has reinforced the erroneous assumption that language development is largely complete by the onset of puberty'' (1989, p. 65).

For Ortony, Schallert, Reynolds and Antos' study (1978), they aimed to investigate some effects of context on the comprehension and the interpretation of idioms and metaphors. Their experiment used target sentences preceded by short and long contexts with both literal and metaphorical sentences, in order to check the context's effectiveness. The findings demonstrated that context facilitates the understanding of the conveyed meanings, but it is worth mentioning that metaphorical sentences preceded by short context took longer to be understood. Moreover, it was found that metaphorical utterances did not require more time to be processed but rather, they were processed as fast as literal utterances or even faster. In addition to that, Ortony et al (1978, p. 476) stated that even though context helps in the comprehension of the intended meanings ''there certainly are cases where an utterance is insufficiently related to the context for it to be understood.'' In other terms, context does help

but not always, it is not everything; and there are cases whether for literal or non-literal uses of language where context can do nothing.

In the same vein, Gibbs (1980), when examining the effect of context on understanding conventional and unconventional uses of idioms, found out that with the with-context condition as well as the no-context condition, subjects took longer to understand literal uses of idiomatic expressions. On the other hand, he insisted on the significance of context as subjects made far more errors when there was no preceding context. He stated that ''without context, there are not enough pragmatic and semantic clues for the subject to recognize the potential unconventional interpretation'' (Gibbs, 1980, p. 151). Furthermore, the results also showed that context helped subjects to interpret the conventional, metaphorical uses of sentences. Moreover, as well as Ortony et al's findings (1978), Gibbs also found that literal sentences are not processed faster. He indicated that ''conventional utterances are easier to integrate into the context of the conversation than are unconventional uses of the same sentences'' (1980, p. 155). What can be said regarding the role of context in the view of Gibbs is that context affects the ease of understanding. In this regard he claimed that:

> If the context in which an utterance is spoken is sufficient, it will provide the listener a semantic framework in which to understand the sentence. Without context, the listener has no predictive power and, consequently, must process the utterance in more of a bottom-up manner (Gibbs, 1980, p. 150).

As it was previously mentioned, the effectiveness of context is still unclear as researchers, on one hand, stated that context is important and much needed; and on the other hand, claiming that this is not always the case, as was already stated by Ortony et al (1978) earlier. Gibbs (1980) apart from his claim that is, context is crucial and assists in understanding idioms, he reported that:

It is possible that context plays much less of a role in helping the listener construct an appropriate interpretation. At the same time, context should playa crucial role in getting the listener to understand an unconventional use of an idiomatic expression (Gibbs, 1980, p. 150).

He argued that even without context, idioms are still processed often figuratively than they are literally, and that context, contrary to what is often believed by researchers, does not have that significant importance in the interpretation of idioms.

It is also worth mentioning that most studies which investigated the role of context in the recognition of idioms were done with native speakers of English. Therefore, more studies should be done with foreign language learners in order to gain more insights about the role of context, and also to be able to compare whether the results obtained from the studies where natives took part are compatible with those that dealt with non-native speakers of English; in addition to examining whether context has the same impact in both cases.

1.7 Importance of Learning English Idioms

Learning English idioms is considered to be one of the distinguishing parts of leaning a language, especially in the case non-native speakers. According to the Oxford dictionary of Current English, ''familiarity with a wide range of idiomatic expressions and the ability to use them appropriately in context are among the distinguishing marks of a native-like command of English'' Cowie and Mackin (as cited in Irujo, 1986, p. 237). Furthermore, Cooper (1999) claimed that idioms are used a lot and found everywhere and in all forms of discourse, being it spoken or written. He states ''indeed, mastery of an L2 may depend in part on how well learners comprehend initially and produce eventually the idioms encountered in everyday language'' (Cooper, 1999, p. 234).

Cooper further believed that ''avoiding the use of idioms gives language a bookish, stilted, unimaginative tone. Learning to use idioms is therefore extremely important for

achieving command of authentic language'' (Cooper, 1999, p. 258). However, besides the highly importance given to idioms, the latter is still a hard task for foreign language learners. Nippold in this regard, reported on the never-ending challenge in learning idioms, saying that ''there is no clear point in human development when it can be said that idioms have been mastered'' (as cited in Cooper, 1999). However, even though a full mastery of idioms seems impossible, L2 learners are still in need to be familiar with a considerable amount of these idiomatic expressions; since the mastery of rules, grammar and vocabulary is not enough. This goes hand in hand with Cooper's claim (1998, p. 259) ''sooner or later, imprecise idiomatic usage will cause difficulties even for a student with an excellent knowledge of grammar and a high level of vocabulary attainment.''

In short, the necessity for learning English idioms is non-negotiable but it is a must. Solomon Weiner reported that ''the English language is so idiomatic and figurative, and these expressions constitute the heart of the language, giving it colour, feeling, charm and precision'' (as cited in Adkins, 1968, p. 149). Therefore, an important first step is to make people aware, that indeed, they are in need to gain the ability to perform such integrations (Cacciari, 1991).

Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher aimed at giving more insights about English idioms. She referred at first at defining formulaic language that entails idioms and other forms of combinations. She then defined idioms and mentioned their characteristics and their classification that varied from one researcher to another. Subsequently, the researcher also tackled the theories of idioms' comprehension that involved native speakers. Eventually, the role of context in idioms' interpretation, as well as the importance of learning English idioms for foreign language learners also took part.

Chapter Two: Idioms and the Foreign Language Learner

Introduction

While the first chapter discussed idioms in isolation and some basic concepts on these idiomatic expressions, the second chapter will mainly look at English idioms in relation to the second/foreign language learner. Therefore, it will first start with how non-native speakers of English came to comprehend English idioms. Furthermore, the researcher will also refer to and highlight the common difficulties learners encounter, as well as the strategies they opt for in order to learn and understand such expressions. Moreover, the relationship between idioms, culture and the second language learner are also pointed to. And finally, some criteria for teaching idioms, as well as the necessity for teaching such expressions will be presented and discussed

2.1 Comprehension of L2 idioms

Cooper (1999) conducted a study aimed at understanding how idioms are processed and comprehended by second language learners of English. Cooper noticed that L1 transfer appears to have an impact over the processing of L2 idioms. This goes in line with Durgunoglu and Hancin-Bhatt's (1992) claim, ''When bilinguals are reading in their second language (L2), they usually bring to the act a wealth of knowledge, strategies, and processes from their first language (L1)'' (p. 3).

Irujo (1986a), in her study, investigated transfer in the acquisition of idioms in a second language. She used 15 idioms and divided them into three groups: idioms that are identical to, idioms that are very close to and those that are totally different from Spanish idioms, in order to test whether second language learners use their first language 'Spanish' in the process of understanding and producing English idioms. Her results revealed that identical idioms or those having equivalents in Spanish were the easiest ones to recognise and produce. Even English idioms that were very similar to Spanish were as easy understood as identical idioms. This means that positive transfer occurred. However, in the production tests of similar idioms

negative transfer took place. As for the totally different idioms, they were the hardest ones whether to produce or even to recognise. However, it is worth mentioning that there was not much evidence about interference at this phase. This study also showed that as similarities between English and Spanish idioms increased, positive transfer decreased and as similarities decreased, positive transfer increased. Irujo believes that

> When differences are slight, the tendency of the human mind is to generalize and ignore those differences. When the differences are so great that two forms have nothing in common, there is no reason to try to use one form in order to produce the other, so little transfer occurs (1986a, p. 7).

Irujo's findings confirmed that second language learners tend to use their first language knowledge of idioms when the two languages are closely related.

Another study was conducted by Elgobshawi (2016), the latter referred to the role transfer plays in the translation of English idioms. Negative transfer has been found to be a significant part in the translation of idioms (Elgobshawi, 2016). His results were in contrast to those of Irujo. He found that positive transfer occurs with similar and identical idioms, which is not the case for Irujo. Furthermore, the findings also demonstrated that interference has been well-observed in the translation of opaque idioms.

Elgobshawi's results were compatible with Durgunoglu and Hancin-Bhatt's claim (1992) who supported that similarities increase positive transfer and difference increase interference, as well as Kellerman's claim ''the closer the two languages, the more can theoretically be transferred successfully'' (1979, p. 40).

The two aforementioned studies investigating transfer in understanding, processing and translating idioms, one dealing with English and Spanish idioms, and one with English and Arabic idioms showed contrasting results. The former revealed that similarities increase interference and differences decrease interference; however, the latter demonstrated opposing

results.   That is, similarities decrease interference and differences increase interference. Nevertheless, the two studies share in common the notion that second language learners of English use their first language (L1) knowledge of idioms when processing and translating English idiomatic expressions.

2.2 Difficulties Involved in Learning and Understanding English Idioms

Researchers agreed that idiomatic expressions are not an easy task to undertake especially for EFL learners or even for native speakers.   They believe that there are many difficulties and challenges that impede the students' learning and understanding of such expressions. Al-haysony (2017), Irujo (1986), Kainulainen (2006), Orfan (2020), Saleh and Zakaria (2013), and Ta'amneh (2021) are among the researchers who were interested in investigating the sources of difficulties of idioms mainly for EFL learners.

Their studies have widely found that the main difficulties that impeded students from learning and comprehending English idiomatic expressions effectively are mainly related to the lack of cultural background, lack of experience dealing with idioms, the absence of context, idioms not being taught well in class and others.

2.2.1 Lack of Cultural Background

It can be said that most if not all of the studies on idioms' learning and understanding have reported on the difficulty of lacking cultural and historical background in the process of learning English idioms. This was one of the main reasons that made EFL learners suffer when dealing with English idioms as these idiomatic expressions are culturally bound or culture-specific, and they cannot be easily understood. In other terms, EFL learners cannot simply arrive at the meaning of these English idiomatic expressions since they carry a non-literal meaning and each expression often carries a story behind its surface meaning. Adkins (1968) in this regard stated that:

Idioms and figures of speech in the English language presented puzzles to the non-native student, resulting in the laborious exercise of working them out rather than being able to comprehend and enjoy the material for itself or for its ability to convey vicariously a particular cultural experience (p.148).

2.2.2 Lack of Exposure

A second main reason that made idioms challenging is the lack of exposure or the lack of experience dealing with idioms (Al-Khawaldeh, Jaradat, Al-momani & Bani-Khair, 2016; Al Haysony, 2017; Irujo, 1986; Orfan, 2020; Saleh & Zakaria, 2013; Ta'amneh, 2021). EFL learners who have not been enough exposed to idioms had a difficulty in learning, understanding and using English idioms as well. Irujo (1986a) stated that even if idioms are heavily found in movies and on television, this is not that much effective and helpful as learners are deprived from that kind of interaction which help them better explain themselves and receive feedback whether from their peers or instructors which is very crucial in the process of language leaning.

Idiomatic expressions have been most of the time avoided and neglected and the focus was mainly on the teaching of grammar and vocabulary. However, Adkins (1968) raised the necessity of teaching English idiomatic expression to non-native speakers of English and stated that ''the teaching of idioms and figures of speech should not be neglected, but should be made a part of the study of grammar and vocabulary for those students who learn English as a second language'' (p. 149); hence, more emphasis should be put on the teaching of such lexical items.

2.2.3 The Absence of Context

Context as stated by most researchers seems to be another important reason that made English idiomatic expressions challenging for second language learners of English, especially with non-transparent, opaque and ambiguous idioms. A number of studies showed that context

affected the students' comprehension and interpretation of idioms and was considered as a main difficulty (Al-Khawaldeh et al., 2016; Alhaysony, 2017; Orfan, 2020; Saleh & Zakaria, 2013).

According to Tiina Kainulainen (2006) context has a fundamental role in the comprehension of idioms. This in turn could mean that the absence of context would affect negatively the understanding and the translation of English idioms. She stated in her study that ''idioms are far more easily understood within a brief of context than without one'' (Kainulainen, 2006, p. 77).

2.2.4 The Absence of Analogue in the First Language

Second language learners tend to find it more challenging when there is no analogue of idiomatic expressions in their first language (Alhaysony, 2017; Orfan, 2020). In other terms, coming across an idiom having no equivalent or relation in the learners' mother language will further complicate the process of learning and understanding English idioms.

2.2.5 Non-literlaness

According to Irujo (1986a), the non-literalness of idioms is also considered to be a difficulty or another reason that made English idioms more complex since these expressions are often figurative. That is why Irujo argued that a word-by-word translation will often falsify the meaning and would not enable second language learners to get the intended meaning; therefore, lead to incorrect translations.

Irujo (1986a) listed other reasons that made idioms difficult apart from those that were already mentioned previously. She reported on the correct use of idioms as well as the teaching materials. She believes that even if learners do master the meanings of some English idiomatic expressions, it is still difficult to correctly use those expressions as they vary in terms of formality as well as situational appropriateness (i.e. Addressing a friend is not like addressing a teacher).

For the teaching materials, it has been claimed that idiomatic expressions were not taught well in class, in addition to the lack of suitable teaching materials (Irujo, 1986a). He reported that ''many second-language teaching materials either ignore idioms entirely or relegate them to the 'other expressions' section of vocabulary lists, without providing exercises or other aids to learning'' (irujo, 1986a, p. 237). This reason, that is idioms not being taught well in class, is supported by other studies who also attributed the difficulty of learning and understanding idioms to the teaching method, teaching materials, as well as idioms not being part of the courses' syllabi (Al-Khawaldeh et al., 2016; Alhaysony, 2017; Saleh & Zakaria, 2013, Ta'amneh, 2021).

In short, it can be said that most if not all of the studies that investigated the major difficulties facing second language learners when learning and understanding English idioms almost found the same difficulties mainly related to the students' lack of experience dealing with English idioms, lack of cultural background, the absence of context in addition to the teaching methods and materials. Besides, it is important to draw attention to the fact that even native speakers of English face difficulties and make mistakes when using idioms (as cited in Kainulainen, 2006). This indicates that it is not easy to teach these idiomatic expressions which often do not respect any grammatical rule, especially to non-native speakers of English. Sornig in this regard stated that ''whilst anything can be learned, not everything can be taught'' (as cited in Kainulainen, 2006, p. 28) and added that these idiomatic expressions should be taught from the viewpoint of natives and how they came to learn them.

2.3 Strategies Involved in Learning and Understanding English Idioms

2.3.1 The Students' Strategies

Research on second language learning and understanding of English idioms showed that second language learners opt for a variety of strategies in order to learn and to figure out the meaning of an idiomatic expression. Al-Khawaldeh et al. (2016), Alhaysony (2017), Cooper

(1999), Orfan (2020), Saleh and Zakaria (2013), Ta'amneh (2021) conducted their studies on second language learners in order to investigate what strategies do EFL learners use and apply in the process of learning and comprehending English idioms. Baker (1992) on the other hand, instead of referring to the learners' strategies; she referred to the strategies that should be applied in idioms' translation.

Cooper (1999), in his study processing of idioms by L2 learners of English, was interested in the on-line processing strategies that non-native speakers of English opt for and apply in order to comprehend English idiomatic expressions and be able to guess their meanings. His results demonstrated that guessing from the context was the most used strategy, followed by discussing and analysing the idioms and referring to the literal meaning of the expression as the most frequently used strategies. Whereas, requesting information, whether about the idiom itself or its context, using background knowledge, repeating or paraphrasing the idiom, referring to an L1 idiom were the less frequently used strategies.

Nevertheless, Cooper (1999) reported that not all the strategies that were mostly used led to successful interpretations of idioms. Therefore, he further examined which strategies led to direct success and which strategies did not. It was found that in a rank order of strategies, guessing from the context in order to get the intended meaning, referring to the literal meaning of the expression, using background knowledge and referring to an L1 idiom were the most strategies that helped and led non-native learners of English to correct interpretations of the English idioms. On the other hand, it can be noticed that both, discussing and analysing idioms and requesting information about the idiom or its context did not help and had no significance in producing correct and successful interpretations.

Other studies like Al-Khawaldeh et al. (2016), Alhaysony (2017), Orfan (2020), Saleh and Zakaria (2013) and Ta'amneh (2021) almost adapted the same questionnaire when examining the strategies used EFL learners in learning and understanding English idioms. The

results of these studies were close but differed in the order as well as the frequency of use of those strategies. Ta'amneh's study showed that learners opted for predicting as a first strategy in working out the meaning of an idiom. This strategy was followed by looking for an L1 equivalent in the learners' native language 'Arabic'. Learners also opted for guessing the meaning from the context since it assisted them in getting the intended, conveyed meaning.

Nevertheless, context in Ta'amneh's study did not appear as a first strategy as most studies did, like Al-Khawaldeh (2016), Alhaysony (2017), Cooper (1999), Rohani, Ketabi and Tavakoli (2012), but rather appeared as a third strategy. The fourth strategy learners applied was relying on verbal and visual information as well as on memorisation to learn such expressions. Learners also opted for dictionaries to look for the meaning of unfamiliar idioms or even unfamiliar words in the idiomatic expression as a fifth strategy.

There were other strategies used by students in Ta'amneh's study; however, their frequency of use was low in comparison to the aforementioned ones. Among them: learning idioms in different media, learning idioms through clear literal meaning and learning idioms through paraphrasing. In addition to Ta'amneh's findings, Al-Khawaldeh et al. (2016) mentioned that learners recognised transparent idioms more easily. He believed that it would be more helpful to teach idioms that have clear meanings and are transparent-oriented rather than opaque-oriented.

2.3.2 Baker's Strategies

Besides the strategies that second language learners applied in order to understand and translate idioms, Baker (1992) in her book 'A Coursebook on Translation' proposed five strategies that should be used for idioms' translation. Nevertheless, Baker shed light on a number of factors that should be taken into consideration in the process of translating these expressions. She first mentioned the significance of the specific lexical items that make up the idiom and whether or not they are manipulated in the original source. She also referred to

appropriateness/ inappropriateness, that is an idiom being appropriate or not to be used in the target language. Furthermore, Baker pointed to acceptability/ non-acceptability, she meant by this factor that the use of these strategies will depend on the context in which the idiom is translated.

The strategies Baker suggested were respectively as follow: using an idiom of similar meaning and form, using an idiom with similar meaning but dissimilar form, translation by paraphrasing, translation by omission and translation by compensation.

2.3.2.1 Using an idiom of similar meaning and form. This strategy simply means to use an idiom that has an equivalent one in the native language but also with equivalent lexical items; however, it is difficult to find an idiom with equivalent meaning and equivalent lexical items. Baker in this regard stated that ''this kind of match can only occasionally be achieved'' (1992, p. 72).

2.3.2.2 Using an idiom with similar meaning but dissimilar form. This strategy is similar to the first one that is using an idiom that has some sort of equivalence in the native language; however, this strategy does not require equivalent lexical items in the two languages.

2.3.2.3 Translation by paraphrasing. Paraphrasing as Baker stated is the most frequently used strategy when the two first one, using an idiom of similar meaning and form, using an idiom with similar meaning but dissimilar form, fail to achieve a successful translation or when there is no match in the target language or even when there are differences in stylistic preferences of the native and the target languages.

2.3.2.4 Translation by omission. This refers to totally omitting or excluding the whole idiomatic expression. This is simply because the expression has no equivalent or match in the target language, cannot be easily paraphrased as it can be because of stylistic reasons.

2.3.2.5 Translation by compensation. The last strategy as Baker explained it ''briefly, this means that one may either omit or play down a feature such as idiomaticity at the point, where it occurs in the source text and introduce it elsewhere in the target text'' (1992, p. 78).

In short and as mentioned above, studies conducted on second language learners in learning and understanding English idioms showed that learners resort to a variety of strategies to learn, understand and properly translate English idioms. Yet, those strategies do not always guarantee successful interpretations and translations of idioms; therefore, other strategies were proposed by Baker as she believed that they would be of greater significance.

2.4 Idioms, Culture and the foreign Language Learner

Language has been defined by the National Centre of Cultural Competence as the "integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, languages, practices, beliefs, values, customs, courtesies, rituals, manners of interacting and roles, relationships and expected behaviours of a racial, ethnic, religious or social group; and the ability to transmit the above to succeeding generations" (Goode, Sockalingam, Brown, & Jones, 2000, p. 2). Therefore, the relationship between language and culture is undeniable as language forms a part of culture.

Moreover, language and culture complete each other, according to Jiang (2000, p. 328) ''language simultaneously reflects culture, and is influenced and shaped by it.'' Thus, both of them are meaningless without each other. Brown (1994, p. 171) on the other side defined them as follow: ''A language is a part of a culture, and a culture is a part of a language: the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture.'' This means that it is just impossible to separate them from each other

Jiang (2000) when addressing the relationship between language and culture, he referred to three metaphors to better illustrate the nature of their relationship from three different views.

From a philosophical view, he believes that language and culture form a living organism, in the sense that culture gives life to language and language in return shapes culture. Therefore, without culture, language would not be alive, and without language, culture would be deformed. From a communicative view, he believes that language and culture form communication, he refers to language as a swimming skill, and to culture as water. This means that without language, communication would be limited, and without culture, communication, would not exist at all. And finally, from a pragmatic view, Jiang refers to language as a vehicle, and to culture as a traffic light. Hence, communication here is like transportation, in the sense that language facilitates communication, and culture in return, organises, fosters, and sometimes hinders communication. In respect to these views, Jiang stated that ''language and culture, as different as they are, form a whole'' (2000, p. 329).

And since idioms fall under the umbrella of language and are part of it, they are also being addressed when referring to the relationship between language and culture.

Rizq (2015), in her study, instead of referring to the broadest term which is 'Language' and its relation to culture, she preferred to refer specifically to the relationship between idioms and culture. Rizq asked 10 participants to report on their perceptions and what they really think concerning the idiom-culture relationship. None of the participants denied that there exist a relationship between idioms and culture. This means that there was a consensus among participants that idioms and culture are strongly linked. Moreover, the participants are aware of the fact that idioms help EFL learners in understanding and knowing more about the target culture. Ahmad for example elaborated on the existing idiom-culture relationship and declared that people's culture is reflected and mirrored through the idioms that are chosen to be used by the speech community. He further illustrated with examples of English idioms from sports which are frequently found to be used in business (e.g., make a pitch, a ball park figure). Rosa's

explanation (you are what you speak) on the other hand seemed obscure and unclear to Rizq because she believes that this description can be interpreted in many different ways.

A third explanation was of Lara, a well-presented explanation as Rizq described it. Lara stated that some idioms are unique and culture-specific, but there exist also some idioms which are universal and shared by various cultures; this in turn represents an indication of similarities across cultures. Lara referred to 'From A to Z' and 'Bite the bullet' as examples to illustrate these similarities and differences among cultures, while the former refers to an idiom that can be found in different cultures, the latter is specific to the American culture.

It can be noticed all studies emphasised the significance of the cultural aspect when dealing with idioms. Min Fan (2007) as well reported on the necessity of learning Chinese idioms because they reflect the Chinese culture and its history. He added that lacking knowledge about Chinese idioms can impose challenges and obstacles in cross-cultural communication. Henceforth, second language learners should be aware of what to speak and to whom as well as being aware that not all behaviours which appear to be appropriate in the learners' society and culture are appropriate and acceptable in the target society (Peterson & Coltrane, 2003). It is for this reason that effective cross-cultural communication in addition to effective knowledge of idioms are of paramount importance.

From this we can conclude that since idioms are part of language, and language is a part of culture and since language and culture cannot exist without each other, this means that even idiomatic expressions and culture as well cannot exist without each other. However, it is worth-mentioning that there was little attention given to the relationship between 'idioms and culture' in particular in the literature.

2.5 Teaching Idioms to Non-Native Speakers of English

Everything that constitutes a language is crucial and worth learning; the same goes for idiomatic expressions since they constitute the heart and the colourful side of a language. As Johnson-Laird (1993) claimed

If natural language had been designed by a logician, idioms would not exist. They are a feature of discourse that frustrate any simple logical account of how the meanings of utterances depend on the meanings of their parts and on the syntactic relations among these parts (p. Vii).

Henceforth, learners must learn and be aware of these expressions thanks to their stylistic as well as pragmatic functions, and especially that they are considered as one of the hallmarks of a native-like proficiency (as cited in Vasiljevic, 2015). As Moon (1998, p. 244) observed idioms are ''not simply a matter of the lexical realization of meaning, but part of the ongoing dynamic interaction between speaker/writer and hearer/reader within the discoursal context.'' Thus, teaching these idiomatic expressions is as essential as any other aspect of language.

Irujo (1986) is one of the few researchers who investigated how idioms should be taught and delivered in the classroom. She believes that the way idioms are introduced, in addition to the inadequate activities are among the reasons that impede second language learners or non-native speakers of English from learning these expressions effectively. Irujo further added that apart from the inappropriate way of teaching idioms, are the teaching materials that either ignore idiomatic expressions at all, or introduce them within the vocabulary list of other expressions, without any kind of practice. This in turn, prevents learners from that kind of interaction which is necessary in language learning.

It is for these reasons that Irujo (1986) listed a number of criteria that should be taken into account when teaching idiomatic expressions, which in turn help learners in both learning and producing idioms. Irujo's criteria were respectively as follow: frequency of use,

transparency, appropriateness, simplicity of form and vocabulary, similarity to first-language idioms and the student-generated idiom lists.

2.5.1 Frequency of Use

Irujo suggested that it is more effective to teach idioms that are frequently used ad encountered in daily life and daily conversations by native speakers. Nevertheless, she stated that the selection of these expressions should be subjective since there no frequency list of English idioms available, so that teachers can choose from. However, it is not that much difficult to make a distinction between '*as a matter of fact*' which is often used, and '*go to bed with the chickens*' which is an infrequently used English idiom.

2.5.2 Transparency

Idioms that tend to be transparent in form, in which the figurative meaning of the expression can be deduced from the sum of its constituents are found to be easier to understand. Irujo stated that some idioms are really frozen and their figurative meaning is transparent and can be easily figured out. She compared '*the coast is clear*' which is a metaphorically transparent English idiom with '*he has a green thumb*'. The latter is a non-transparent English idiom which cannot be easily understood and will probably require explanations from the teacher.

2.5.3 Appropriateness

Irujo suggested that the teacher should be selective when choosing which idioms to teach, he should avoid those expressions that are unlikely to be used by second language learners at all such as colloquial use of idioms or slang, unless they appeal to the learner and find them useful to be learnt.

2.5.4 Simplicity of Form and Vocabulary

Irujo stated that the idioms which are chosen to be taught should not cause a problem of vocabulary or grammar to the learners. Idioms with infrequent vocabulary or illogical

grammatical structures are challenging and hard to be recognised by non-native speakers of English such as '*a needle in a haystack*', or '*high water*' unlike *'pass the buck'* which follow a simple from and consisted of simple vocabulary.

2.5.5 Similarity to First-Language Idioms

As mentioned previously, second language learners use their first language knowledge of idioms; therefore, it is advised to teach or at least start with those expressions which are identical or similar to the learners' first language instead of starting with totally different idioms, the latter as Cooper (1998) claimed ''will be the hardest for the learner and will require more practice time and explanation'' (p. 261).

2.5.6 The Student-Generated Idiom Lists

As Irujo stated, instead of referring to all of the aforementioned criteria in order to teach idioms, the teacher can simply refer to the idioms that appeal to the learners' interest and this in turn become the basis for the teaching activities.

Most of the criteria proposed by Irujo were also pointed to and supported by Cooper (1998). In short, these idiomatic expressions cannot be neglected and should be taught and made part of the learners' learning process. This goes in line with Irujo's statement

> Learning idioms is, or should be, an integral part of vocabulary learning in a second language. Therefore, it should not be put off until students reach advanced levels. Even at beginning levels, idioms can be added to the vocabulary being learned by including them in dialogues and stories which are created to supplement regular materials, and by providing idiomatic synonyms for vocabulary words which the students are learning (1986, p. 240).

Conclusion

This chapter shed more light on English idioms in relation to the second language learner. It first started with the comprehension of idioms by the L2 learners, and then

highlighted some challenges that impeded learners from learning and understanding these expressions effectively. The researcher also tackled the strategies learners apply in learning and understanding English idioms. After that, she looked at the relationship between idioms, culture and the learner. At the end, some criteria to better teach idiomatic expressions were presented.

Chapter Three: Fieldwork and Data Analysis

Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology for this study, the choices and the rationale behind it, including the research paradigms, approaches, designs, the data collection tools, namely the students' questionnaire and the teachers' interview. Additionally, the data collection, as well as the data analysis procedures, and the sampling technique are going to be highlighted. Moreover, it also attempts to present the results obtained from the data collection instruments, discuss and synthesise them.

3.1 Research Methodology for this Study: Choices and Rationale

3.1.1 The Research Paradigms

Different scholars referred to research paradigms differently (worldviews, epistemologies, ontologies...); however, they all agreed that research is influenced by such paradigms; although, they do not seem to be explicitly identified (Creswell, 2018). Research paradigms have been defined as "a general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to a study" (Creswell, 2018, p. 44). Moreover, these paradigms are developed through the researcher's past experiences, discipline orientations and so on, leading to a strong qualitative, quantitative or a mixed-methods approach in their study, depending on the researcher's position. The main positions are: postpositivism, constructivism, tranformative, and pragmatism. Each of these positions depend heavily on the nature of the study as well as the outcomes we aim to achieve; and therefore, this study adopts the constructivist paradigm which is often linked to interpretivism and regarded as an approach to qualitative inquiry; thus, it is the most convenient one for the study under investigation.

3.1.2 The Research Approaches

It is believed that there is not one way of doing research; and therefore, research is not monolithic (Mackey & Gass, 2015). In second language research, there are three approaches

that are commonly utilised when conducting research, each have its own methods and procedures. These are respectively, qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods approaches. Qualitative approaches deal with words rather than numbers; thus, they involve narrations, descriptions, as well as interpretations. Quantitative approaches on the other hand, deal with numbers instead of words; hence, the data is quantified.

Furthermore, while qualitative studies make use of interpretive analysis, quantitative studies make use of statistical analysis. In the time being, mixed-methods approaches, as the name suggests, involve the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches and make use of both of them whether in data collection process or the data analysis process (Creswell, 2018). As a result, and due to the exploratory nature of the present study, and the research questions, as well as the aims we aimed to achieve, we opted for the qualitative research approach.

3.1.3 The Research Designs

Although there exists a plethora of research designs for all types of research, the current study follows the case study design due to its compatibility with the exploratory nature of the study. This exploratory case study design aims at examining the challenges hindering EFL students from effective learning and understanding of English idioms in the Algerian context.

The case study design is a qualitative research design; thus, non-experimental. As defined by stake, the case study is the study of "the particularity and complexity of a single case" (as cited in Dörnyei, 2007, p. 151). A case study was also defined as "a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals." (as cited in Creswell &Creswell, 2018, p. 51). Stake (as cited in Dörnyei, 2007) has identified three main types of case studies. They are respectively, the intrinsic case study, the instrumental case study and the multiple/ collective case study.

Moreover, it is worth noting that case studies can include not only qualitative research tools, but even quantitative ones as well, so as to boost and to have more understandings and insights of the phenomenon under study (Dörnyei, 2007). This goes in line with Yin's claim (2003, p. 14) "case studies can include and even be limited to quantitative evidence."

3.1.4 Data Collection Methods

Different types of data collection methods are to be found in second language research, each depending on the nature of study, the questions raised, as well as the aims we are willing to arrive at. They are also referred to as data collection tools; they mainly refer to the instruments the researcher is willing to use in gathering the data necessary for the accomplishment of the study under investigation; hence, answering the research questions. As previously stated and due to the qualitative nature of the present study, qualitative data collection tools are then to be used, namely a semi-structured questionnaire with students and a semi-structured interview with teachers.

3.1.4.1 Students' questionnaire. One of the most widely used instruments in the process of collecting data are questionnaires. According to Brown

Questionnaires are any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answers (2001, p. 6).

Moreover, questionnaires can yield three types of data about the respondents. These are factual, behavioural, as well as attitudinal data; and therefore, reflect the students' perspectives and beliefs. It is for this reason that an unstructured questionnaire was constructed and administered to master one students during their academic writing lecture; however, later on there was a shift to a semi-structured questionnaire as it helped to have a clearer image and viewpoint about the research problem.

3.1.4.1.1 Aim and structure. The ultimate goal of the questionnaire was highlighting the main difficulties that impeded EFL students from effective learning and understanding of English idiomatic expressions. Hence, it aimed at answering the three main research questions related to the students' difficulties, strategies, in addition to whether the adopted teaching methods added to the idioms' difficulty for both first- and second-year master students at the department of English in Biskra University.

The adopted semi-structured questionnaire containing both close-ended and open-ended questions was comprised of five sections with an overall number of 27 questions. The questionnaire started with an introductory section including the title of the study, and ensuring the privacy of the students' responses. It then aimed at familiarising students with the concept of idioms and provided three examples. The first section of the questionnaire was a consent letter, taking the students' authorisation in answering the questions. The next section dealt with students' use and perceptions about English idioms in order just to gain a thorough understanding of their use of idioms and how important they find idiomatic expressions in the form of statements on 5-point Likert scale. The section was later on followed by a single open-ended question.

Moreover, the following section examined the students' implemented strategies in learning and understanding English idioms. It comprised five strategies on a 5-point Likert scale and one open-ended question. The last part was an attempt to check the students' satisfaction about the course delivery in terms of the adopted teaching methods, as well as the time devoted, ending up with asking students on how they would like the lesson to be delivered in order to suggest solutions smoothing the learning process of idioms.

3.1.4.1.2 Piloting and validation. Since we shifted from an unstructured questionnaire to a semi-structured questionnaire and due to time constraints, no one other than the supervisor validated the questionnaire who stated that it was ready for distribution. The same goes for the

piloting phase; only the first questionnaire has been piloted with three students from the population.

   3.1.4.2 Teachers' interview. Interviews are known for their popularity and frequency of use in qualitative inquiries, thanks to their turn-taking that permits a wealth collection of data. An interview has been defined as "a conversation for gathering information. A research interview involves an interviewer, who coordinates the process of the conversation and asks questions, and an interviewee, who responds to those questions" (Easwaramoorthy, Zarinpoush & Imagine Canada, 2006, p. 1).

   In addition, different types of interviews are identified, including the structured, the unstructured and the semi-structured interviews. The latter is the most widely used type and the one adopted for the current study. It comprises a set of pre-prepared questions with some sort of freedom for both the interviewer and the interviewee to elaborate more when needed. As Mackey and Gass (2015) described them, semi-structured interviews are "less rigid" (p. 225). Therefore, two teachers at department of English in Biskra University were interviewed for the accomplishment of this study.

   3.1.4.2.1 Aim and structure. As far as this study is concerned, the interview had the goal of answering the three research questions from the teachers' perspective, their students' difficulties and implemented strategies in the process of learning idioms, as well as implicitly examining the teachers' teaching methods of idioms at the department of English in Biskra University.

   The interview was a face-to-face semi-structured interview, allowing some kind of freedom for both the interviewer and the interviewee. It was divided into two sections. The first section consisted of two questions about the teachers' teaching experience at university. Meanwhile the second part of the interview dealt with idioms' instruction in the classroom, and

answered the three research questions. The questions are respectively as follow: What are the difficulties encountered by EFL learners in learning English idioms? What the strategies implemented by EFL students in the process of learning idioms? Does the way idioms are taught contribute to their learning' difficulty?

    3.1.4.2.2 Piloting and validation. Unlike the questionnaire that has been changed, the semi-structured interview was the one opted for from the very beginning; thus, it was validated with four teachers via email: three local teachers including the supervisor and one external teacher. Teachers were provided with an opinionnaire to fill in with answers about the relevance, the ambiguity, the length of the interview and so on. Two comments were made by two different teachers. Only one was taken into account as it helped us in reformulating one of the questions that considered revising.

3.1.5 Data Collection Procedures

    The data collection phase for this study took place during the last week of April. Both interviews and questionnaires were collected simultaneously; unfortunately, the questionnaire was conducted again and replaced by a semi-structured one after being administered and answered by some students. The decision of shifting from the unstructured questionnaire was taken after noticing the students' unwillingness to answer the questionnaire, as they find it long and difficult to answer.

    This decision was then confirmed after receiving only 14 copies from 30 copies distributed to first year master students during their academic writing session. Therefore, only the interviews were conducted and recorded at that time, teachers were approached a week before the interviews took place and consented to participate orally, mentioning that they demonstrated tremendous support and pleasure for taking part in the study.

    Later on, the semi-structured questionnaire was prepared and validated only by the supervisor due to time constraints. Moreover, the questionnaire was distributed online via the

official master Facebook group because of the unavailability of students during the second semester. In addition to that, it is worth mentioning that the sample has changed from first year master students to both first- and second-year students, due to time constraints and the lack of first year master participants who were passing their tests at that time.

3.1.6 Data Analysis Procedures

Since the current study is purely qualitative in nature, the researcher went for qualitative data analysis procedures. Both descriptive statistics as well as thematic analysis were utilised. While the former is defined as "a simple summary or overview of the data, thus allowing researchers to gain a better overall understanding of the data set" (Mackey &Gass, 2005, p. 292). The latter refers to "the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 76). Descriptive statistics was used to analyse the questionnaire by providing frequencies, percentages and displaying them in the form of charts. Only yes/ no questions were displayed using pie charts. Furthermore, the open-ended questions of the questionnaire, as well as the interview's questions were analysed using thematic analysis, where the researcher sought to identify repeated patterns.

3.1.7 Population and Sampling Technique

The target population for this study was master students, including first- and second-year master students; in addition to teachers in charge of the language mastery course at the department of English in Mohamed Khider University of Biskra.

Convenience, non-random sampling was the sampling technique utilised for this study. As defined "convenience sampling also known as availability sampling relies on data collection from population members who are conveniently available to participate in study" (Amrate, 2021). The researcher opted for this sampling technique due to the students'' availability, accessibility and willingness to participate. Therefore, and due to the limited period of time,

20 first and second year master students comprised the sample for current research work in addition to two teachers in charge of the language mastery class.

3.2 Results and Data Analysis

3.2.1 The students' Questionnaire

Table 3.1

Students' use and perceptions of English idioms

		Frequency				
		Percentage				
Item No	Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
1	I am very active when the lesson of idioms is delivered in the classroom.	3 15,0 %	4 20,0 %	5 25 %	8 40 %	0 0,0 %
2	I often use English idioms.	4 20,0 %	4 20,0 %	3 15,0 %	7 35,0 %	2 10,0 %
3	I like to use English idioms when speaking.	6 30,0 %	2 10,0 %	1 5,0 %	11 55,0 %	0 0,0 %
4	I like to use English idioms in writing.	8 40,0 %	6 30,0 %	4 20,0 %	1 5,0 %	1 5,0 %
5	I use English idioms only inside the classroom.	6	4	4	4	2

		30,0 %	20,0 %	20,0 %	20,0 %	10,0 %
6	I use English idioms even	9	2	0	7	2
	outside the classroom.	45,0 %	10,0 %	0,0 %	35,0 %	10,0 %
	Total			20		
				100 %		

The above table shows the frequency of students and their percentage of agreement to each of the aforementioned statements on a 5-point Likert scale; these statements serve to elicit the students' use of idiomatic expressions. As demonstrated in the first statement, 40 % agreed that they are very active in the lesson of idioms; however, none of the respondents strongly agreed with it. 35 % of the respondents disagreed with this statement with (20 % disagreed and 15 % strongly disagreed). Meanwhile, the remaining 25 % were undecided and uncertain about this statement.

In the second statement, the students were asked to show how often they use English idioms. 35 % of the respondents agreed that they often use English idioms and 10 % strongly agreed with it. On the other side, 20 % strongly disagreed and 20 % as well disagreed with it. As for the remaining respondents were undecided on how often they use idioms, with a percentage of 15 %.

The third statement was meant to know whether students like to use English idioms while speaking or not. On the other hand, the fourth statement is considered with writing instead of speaking. The percentages showed opposing results, in which 55 % of the respondents agreed on using idioms while speaking, with none of them strongly agreed. Meanwhile, 30 % strongly disagreed, with 10 % disagreed and 5 % remained undecided. On the side, 70 % of the respondents did not like to use English idioms in writing with 40 %

strongly disagreed and 30 % disagreed and 20 % were undecided. In the meantime, only 10 % of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed with a percentage of 5 % for each.

In the last two statements five and six, the students were asked to report on their use of idiomatic expressions. The fifth statement is concerned with students' use of English idioms inside the classroom, and the sixth with students' use of English idioms outside the classroom. The results were as follow: within statement five, 30 % strongly disagreed and 20 % disagreed with the use of idioms inside the classroom, and 20 % were undecided as well, for those who agreed the percentage was 30 % with 20 % agreed, and 10 % strongly agreed. Nevertheless, in the sixth statement of using idioms outside the classroom, 45 % of the respondents strongly disagreed with it, followed by 10 % disagreed. In the same time 35 % of the students agreed and revealed their use of English idioms outside the classroom, followed by 10 % strongly agreed. This statement also revealed that none of students was undecided and uncertain about his/ her use of English idioms outside the classroom.

This section also comprised of two other open-ended questions, mainly related to the students' perceptions and points of view regarding the necessity of teaching and learning English idiomatic expressions as well as their importance to them as EFL students.

Q07. In your opinion, are idiomatic expressions necessary to be learnt and taught?

Table 3.2

Students' responses towards the necessity of learning/ teaching idioms

Option	Number	Percentage
Yes	20	100 %
No	0	0.0 %

Total	20	100 %

This open-ended question was accompanied with yes/ no options and students were then asked to justify on their choice. All of the 20 students voted with yes, which means that they are aware of the necessity of learning idioms. However, they differed in the way they justified their choices, and their justifications fell into different categories. Students first stated that the teaching and learning of idiomatic expressions will assist students to know more about the target culture since idioms are one important aspect of both language and culture. As claimed by one of the respondents ''to learn a language is to learn its culture.''

The students also reported that idioms make them sound more fluent, more natural, and have a native-like command English, as well as reflecting their level of proficiency. As stated by some students ''idioms are an essential part of sounding fluent and natural.'' Added another ''idioms reflect a high level of language proficiency.'' As well as ''idioms make you sound like a native speaker.'' From this it can be deduced that EFL students prefer and want to sound native-like, fluent, and they also believe that learning idioms and the ability to use these expressions appropriately reflect their language proficiency level.

A third category is that idioms facilitate communication. Students believe that learning idioms help them to understand spoken and even written discourses developed by native speakers or even those who prefer to use them in their conversations. As one of the respondents claimed:

I think everything that constitutes language is necessary to learn including idioms, especially that idiomatic expressions convey communicative meanings that may confuse non-natives and eventually break communication if not understood. Therefore, it is

necessary to learn idiomatic expressions so to improve one's communicative competence in order to successfully communicate in the target language.

Other students maintained that idioms allow you to convey your messages and express yourself saying just few words instead of saying long phrases; some simply stated that idioms are interesting, followed by those who said that idioms break the boredom of expressions especially when it comes to speaking, giving it more charm.

Q08. What do you think regarding the importance of learning English idioms as an EFL student?

This question did not provide the students with yes/ no options to choose, as it does not require that and especially that it intended to show the students' perceptions regarding the importance of learning English idioms. All students stated that learning English idioms is highly important and crucial for them, especially as EFL students. They believe that as EFL students, they should be aware and have some idioms in their linguistic repertoire, at least the most used ones as they are encountered everywhere. He said:

It is important to learn the linguistic features and structures of the target language for better comprehension and production, and learning idiomatic expressions is no exception. I think that at a certain level, EFL learners have to get acquainted with the concept of idioms. They also have to learn at least the current frequently used idioms in the English language (for example, native speakers do not use the idiom "it's raining cats and dogs" instead they tend to use, among others, the expression "it's pouring".

They also stated that since they are non-native speakers of English, they should reach a certain level of language mastery; therefore, learning idioms is of high priority. Moreover, they added that these expressions reinforce communication and help them to avoid the misunderstandings

that might occur, since idioms require understanding what is communicated more than what is said. As claimed

> I think the primary goal for EFL students is to be communicatively competent to successfully communicate using the target language. The importance of English idioms lays in that it offers a potential to achieve communicative competence because it helps us look beyond the literal meaning and understand the hidden meaning.

> Besides that, one of the students, even though he believed that idioms are important, he stated that idioms are only crucial for those who want to reach an advanced level of English, he said

> Idioms are necessary for those who want/ need to excel or obtain an advanced level in the language; otherwise, communication which is the ultimate aim behind the use of language might be easily achieved without the use of idioms.

Table 3.3

Students' difficulties in learning and understanding English idioms

| | | Frequency | | | | |
| | | Percentage | | | | |
Item No	Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1	Idioms are difficult because of the lack of cultural background	3 15,0 %	0 0,0 %	2 10,0 %	7 35,0 %	8 40,0 %

2	Idioms are difficult because of the lack of exposure to them	3	2	2	8	5
		15,0 %	10,0 %	10,0 %	40,0 %	25,0 %
3	Idioms are difficult because they are not taught well in class	5	2	3	7	3
		25,0 %	10,0 %	15,0 %	35,0 %	15,0 %
4	Idioms are difficult because they are presented only as a simple lesson in the language mastery course	4	2	2	6	6
		20,0 %	10,0 %	10,0 %	30,0 %	30,0 %
5	Idioms are difficult because of their vocabulary	6	5	5	3	1
		30,0 %	25,0 %	25,0 %	15,0 %	5,0 %
6	Idioms are difficult when there is no context	3	3	1	3	10
		15,0 %	15,0 %	5,0 %	15,0 %	50,0 %
7	Idioms are difficult when they are processed independently (word by word translation)	4	1	2	3	10
		20,0 %	5,0 %	10,0 %	15,0 %	50,0 %
	Total			20		
				100 %		

This section is intended to highlight the main difficulties EFL students encounter when dealing with English idioms. It presented seven difficulties on a 5-point Likert scale, and students were asked to choose to which extent they agree or disagree with each statement. The first statement asked students whether the lack of cultural background adds to the idioms' difficulty, to which 75% agreed and strongly agreed with a percentage of 35 % and 40 % respectively. 10 % remained neutral, and 15 % strongly disagreed with no one disagreed.

The second difficulty referred to the lack of exposure to idioms. The results showed a high agreement of students with this statement in which 65 % agreed and strongly agreed, with 40 % and 25 % respectively. However, only 25 % of the students disagreed, in which 15 % strongly disagreed and 10 % disagreed. Meanwhile, a percentage of 10 % of students as well were neutral.

As demonstrated in the third statement. It was concerned with idioms delivery in class, students agreed that idioms are not taught well in class with a percentage of 35 %. Different percentages were found in the other two levels of agreement (disagree 25 %, neutral 15 %); equally, students strongly agreed with a percentage of 15 %. On the other hand, a percentage of disagreement with this statement was also found, with an estimated percentage of 10 %.

The fourth statement was also concerned with idioms' instruction in the classroom; nevertheless, it entailed that idioms are difficult because they are presented as a simple lesson in the language mastery course, rather than not being taught well. The percentage of students' agreement was significantly higher with a percentage of 60 % (30 % for each). In the same time, the percentage of disagreement was 20 % for those who strongly disagreed and 10 % disagreed. Therefore, 10 % of students remained neutral.

For statement five, it viewed that idioms are difficult because of their vocabulary; however, the percentage of disagreement with this statement was higher than that of agreement,

to which 30 % of the respondents strongly disagreed, and 25 % disagreed. Meanwhile, 20 % of the students agreed and strongly agreed, with 15 % and 5 % respectively. Moreover, it can be noticed that the percentage of students' who remained neutral with this statement was also high when compared to the other statements, with a percentage of 25 %.

For the last two statements, the sixth one argued that idioms become more difficult when presented out of the context, and the last one stated that idioms become difficult when translated word by word. The findings of these two statements were close to each other. In the first one 30 % was the percentage of disagreement with 15 % for each (disagree and strongly disagree). 5 % were neutral, followed by 15 % of the students agreed and 50 % strongly agreed. Equally, students' agreement with the last statement was 65 % with 15 % agreed and 50 % strongly agreed. In the same time, 20 % strongly disagreed and 5 % disagreed. In this case, 10 % of the respondents remained neutral.

The above table was followed by an open-ended question, and students were invited to list any other difficulties they faced when dealing with English idioms that were not included in the table. However, most of the students did not list any other difficulties, except for some of them who related the difficulty of learning and understanding English idioms to the lack of authentic materials (e.g., videos...). One student reported on the large and the unlimited number of idioms that exist, which make the task even harder for them as EFL students to learn idioms. Another student claimed that the lack of practice outside the classroom and the lack of students' willingness to learn these expressions adds to their difficulty. And a last student said that the absence of contact with natives also makes idiomatic expressions challenging to learn and understand. He said ''efficient communication with natives enhances the grasp of figurative language.''

Table 3.4

Students' strategies in learning and understanding English idioms

		Frequency				
		Percentage				
Item No	Statements	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	I use literal translation in order to understand the meaning of idioms	11	5	3	1	0
		55,0 %	25,0 %	15,0 %	5,0 %	0,0 %
2	I look for equivalents of idioms in my native language	3	3	8	5	1
		15,0 %	15,0 %	40,0 %	25,0 %	5,0 %
3	I rely on the context	1	0	5	5	9
		5,0 %	0,0 %	25,0 %	25,0 %	45,0 %
4	I learn idioms through memorisation	7	3	3	5	2
		35,0 %	15,0 %	15,0 %	25,0 %	10,0 %
5	I rely on verbal and visual information	1	2	8	8	1
		5,0 %	10,0 %	40,0 %	40,0 %	5,0 %
	Total			20		
				100 %		

The above table represents the third section of the questionnaire which sought to highlight the strategies EFL students opt for in learning and understanding English idioms. It contained 5 strategies, and students had to choose whether they never, rarely, sometimes, often or always used each of the five aforementioned statements on a 5-point Likert scale. As shown in the first statement, more than half of the students never opt for the use of literal translation in order to learn and understand English idioms with a percentage of 55 %, followed by 25 % who rarely use this strategy. In the time being, 15 % of the respondents seemed to use this strategy sometimes. 5 % said they often rely on literal translation; however, none of the students stated that they always use it.

The second statement realised that students look for equivalents in their mother language, to which 15 % claimed that they never use it. Equally, 15 % of the respondents stated that they rarely look for equivalent of idioms. Furthermore, it can be noticed that almost half of the students seemed to use sometimes this strategy with an estimated percentage of 40 %. While 25 % of the respondents often looked for equivalents and only 5 % always relied on this strategy.

The third statement aimed to know whether students rely on the context or not. As demonstrated, students seemed to rely heavily on this strategy with a percentage of 45 % who always used it, and 25 % often used it. The same percentage was found with students who sometimes relied on this strategy (25 %). On the other hand, only 5 % said they never opted for context. With none of them rarely used it.

Statement four maintained that students rely on memorisation; however, 35 % of the respondents never used this strategy, and 15 % of them rarely opted for it. In the meantime, 15 %seemed to rely on memorisation sometimes, 25 % often relied on it, and 10 % who always used this strategy.

In the last statement, students were asked to say whether they rely on verbal and visual information in learning and understanding English idioms or not. The findings revealed that a percentage of 5 % of students never used it. Equally, 5 % always relied on this strategy. Meanwhile, 40 % of students sometimes and often relied on verbal and visual aids with 10 % rarely used it.

This section also included an open-ended question that aimed to check whether there are other strategies students use in learning and understanding English idioms, and were not mentioned in the above table. More than half of the students did not mention any other strategies. However, among them, two students said they found it helpful to watch how native speakers use these expressions in their everyday conversations. Whereas two other students stated that they simply refer to the internet and learn idioms by heart using apps. As for the last two students, they declared that using English idioms in their daily conversations and practicing them with their peers will boost their English idiomatic competence.

The last section of the questionnaire was meant to check the students' satisfaction about the way idioms were delivered in class.

Q01. Are you satisfied with the way idioms are delivered in the classroom?

Table 3.5

Students' Satisfaction about the Course Delivery

Option	Number	Percentage
Yes	3	15,0 %
No	17	85,0 %
Total	20	100 %

Figure 3.1

Students' Satisfaction about the Course Delivery
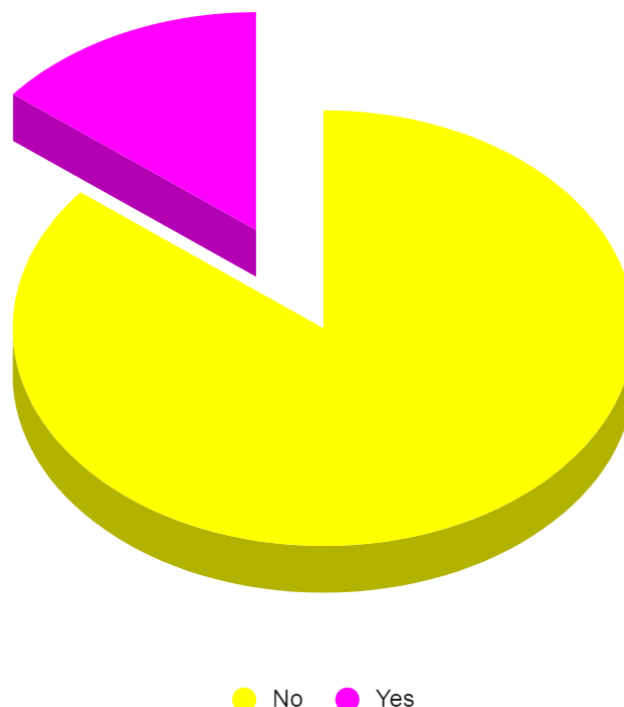
In the first question, the students were questioned whether they were satisfied on the way English idioms were delivered in class or not. This question was accompanied with yes/ no options. And the results revealed that 85,0 % of the respondents answered with 'No', which means they are dissatisfied with the way of teaching. Meanwhile, only 15,0 % of the students were satisfied. Students' dissatisfaction was attributed to many reasons. One reason that appeared repeatedly among students is that idioms were taught in separation, and no context was provided. As claimed

> We learn idioms in a decontexualised setting where idioms are learned/taught as individual items to be memorized. Last year in the language mastery lecture about idioms we tackled some general rules alongside some common idioms in a very decontexualised manner.

A second main reason is that the students found the lesson not beneficial at all, and was delivered in a very superficial way, without any kind of practice and without paying much importance to it. He/ she said ''idioms were not taken as serious as they should have been. There was no emphasis on their importance and utility.''

Others stated that during their whole experience of learning English at university, they dealt with English idioms only once, more in a theoretical way, rather than a practical one. They further added that the lesson was only in the form of a presentation by their classmates in the language mastery course. One of the evidences was:

> Last year, in the language mastery class, idioms were presented by our classmates who knew nothing about idioms at all, all what they did was collecting information about idioms and then presented them from a merely theoretical perspective. I personally found it boring and has nothing to do with idioms.

Added another, "we tackled idioms just one time during the whole journey of university studies." Students emphasised the fact that they did not deal with idioms sufficiently, and one exposure is absolutely not enough.

Another justification was "because university." This justification was very confusing. It is true that the student by this expressed his dissatisfaction; however, this explanation can carry more than one meaning and more than one interpretation. Does the student mean that because it is university, they should not wait for more than this? Or does he mean that students at this level should rely on themselves and not on the teacher? Therefore, it was hard to understand what the respondent meant by this expression.

Besides those who expressed their dissatisfaction, there were three respondents who expressed their satisfaction about the way they have been taught the lesson of idioms with a percentage of 14,3 %. These students stated that they were taught in a good way and idioms

were presented in a good manner by their teachers with effective strategies to detect their meaning. As claimed by one of them "the way we were taught was effective as we were given some strategies in order to detect the meaning behind them while used in speech or written documents. Moreover, giving them as a presentation is also an efficient way for learners to learn a good number of idioms."

Q02. Do you think that the time devoted for the lesson is sufficient?

Table 3.6

Students' satisfaction about the amount of exposure

Option	Number	Percentage
Yes	1	5,0 %
No	19	95,0 %
Total	20	100 %

Figure 3.2

Students' satisfaction about the amount of exposure
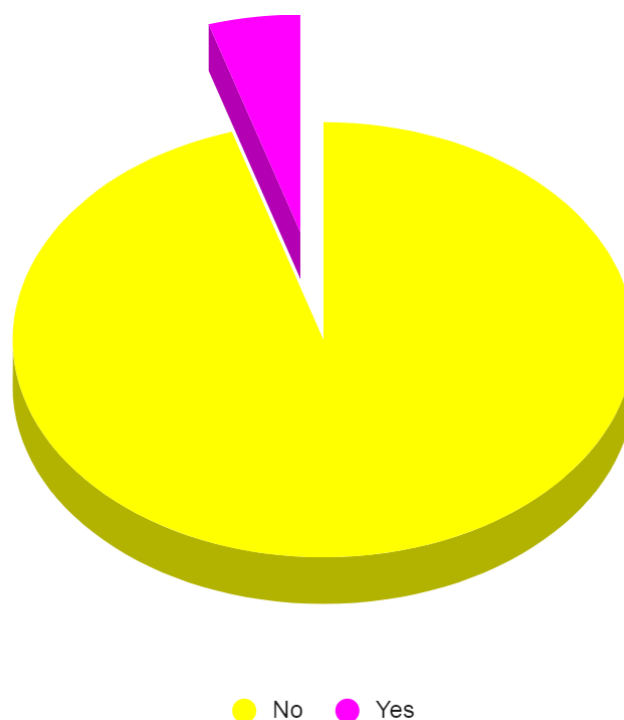
This question was asked only to know whether the time devoted for the lesson was enough or not, without requiring any justifications; and it was assumed that students would comment on this issue in the first question since they were asked about their satisfaction and dissatisfaction as well, and had to justify their answer. The results of this question as demonstrated in the above table showed that 95,0 % of the respondents think the time was not sufficient for learning, more importantly developing a good competence in such a complex aspect of language as idioms. On the contrary, only one student who thought that the time devoted was sufficient, with an estimated percentage of 5,0 %. This was also somehow confusing since it was expected that the students who were satisfied with the way idioms were taught, would also find the time sufficient.

Q03. How would you like idiomatic expressions to be taught?

This question was intended to find out how students would like the lesson of idioms to be delivered. Most of the students insisted on the fact that idioms should be learnt in interactive settings, through visualisation. They said "it would be better to learn idiomatic expressions in context using visual assistance maybe." Students seem to enjoy the learning of English idioms through games, role plays and discussions, making use of visual materials like pictures and videos of native speakers.

The students were also aware that developing such a competence would require a lot of practice and real-life application, as well as learning and practicing these expressions outside the classroom, especially, that most of them think that the time devoted was insufficient. As claimed

It would be helpful as well to put what is learnt into practice and use in real life situations. It is also important to note that idioms should not be learnt only inside the classroom. Learning outside classroom settings facilitates learning such expressions.

Other students stated that idioms should be integrated at the very beginning, in all levels, and take part in different modules, as this boosts the process of learning these English idiomatic expressions. One said:

I personally would like idiomatic expressions to be integrated in all modules. For instance, in pragmatics, discourse analysis and culture and civilization, idioms can be part of the courses in which teachers expose learners to the mostly used idiomatic expressions by native speakers; in this case, they will learn them by exposure and in the right contexts.

What all the students agreed on, even though they slightly differed in the way they liked idioms to be delivered, is the need to contextualise these expressions in order to gain more insights, more understandings and being able to detect the idioms' intended conveyed meaning.

Q04. If there is anything you want to add, please feel free.

The last question aimed to ask students if they want to add anything, and had not the chance to say it, being it a comment, a suggestion, an explanation or even a criticism. However, only three students added some comments, one of them was inviting and encouraging students to be more autonomous and self-reliant, and try to learn and practice English idioms even outside the classroom. The second one was inviting all teachers instead of students to emphasise the importance of learning English idioms even if they do not take part in their courses' syllabi and will not teach them. As for the last one, it can be considered as a comment, rather than a piece of advice. He/ she said:

> Most of students are actually using their native language as a source for their SL which makes the learning process incorrect; therefore, learning idioms is one way to get rid of this.

3.2.2 Results of the Teachers' Interview

The teachers' interview was divided into two sections, one related to the teachers' teaching experience and the second one was concerned with idioms' instruction in the classroom and aimed to answer all of the research questions that were raised at the very beginning.

The first section contained two questions asking about the teachers' overall duration of teaching English, as well as the duration of teaching the language mastery course. T1 seemed a way too experienced when compared to T2, he had been teaching English at university for 13 years. He has been teaching the language mastery course for like 6 or 7 years when it was initially introduced to the canvas. While T2 seemed to be semi-experienced, he has been teaching English at university and the language mastery course for almost four years.

Q01. Since idioms take part in the language mastery course syllabus, what do you think regarding the importance of learning/ teaching idioms for EFL students?

This question aimed to have a clear viewpoint about the teachers' perceptions regarding the importance of English idioms. Both teachers agreed that idioms are very important to be learnt and taught as it is the case with any aspect of the English language; yet, their answers were diverse. T1 in this regard, stated that they often tend to separate language and culture although they cannot be actually separated, and idioms are one aspect that combines both language and culture. T1 said

> The importance of introducing idioms being one of the good representations of culturally bound expressions... it's very important to introduce them early to students right from their first year, so that they would be familiar with the concept of idioms. So, at least they start learning them gradually from, for example level A which is beginners till advanced levels.

T2 on the other hand, emphasised the importance of idioms and considered them as an escape from the formal language that EFL students are forced to use. He spoke

> Idioms are so much fun, like they are really good examples of how like English is used in lower street levels. Not like academia, because academia tends to be a little bit boring to tell you the truth. And it's this, idioms, phrasal verbs, which could be an escape for, let's say, an academic researcher or student to like escape from the boredom of academic discourse, academic linguistics and stuff like that.

He further added, "I'm definitely in favour of using idioms as part of many, many, many courses, not only mastery of language." Teachers when answering this question insisted on two things. T1 stated that students should get exposed to idioms right from the very beginning. While T2 in the meantime, insisted on integrating idioms in different modules, adding that they should not be restricted only to the language mastery course.

Q02. Do you adopt a specific teaching method while delivering the lesson of idioms?

The reasoning behind this question was to know more about the teachers' teaching method, whether it is an effective one or not. Moreover, this question implicitly assisted in checking whether the methods adopted and the teachers' way of teaching contribute to the idioms' learning difficulty. According to T1, he said that he does not have a specific method for teaching idioms specifically, but rather a method for teaching formulaic language in general, including idioms, collocations, phrasal verbs and so on. T1 and T2 both have been dealing with idioms the same way, which is having students presenting something on idioms, and preparing some activities.

However, T1 assumed that he is aware of the existing deficiency in teaching such culturally-bound expressions. As claimed

I am aware that there is a deficiency in the way they have been introduced to students, all over these years that I have been teaching idioms...I believe that using videos, audios, I mean audio visuals, or through authentic videos where natives use idioms in their conversations would be the best one. Though, I did not have neither the chance nor the tools to do it.

T2 went on to say that in their first year, they used to present the lesson of idioms themselves with some activities. As stated,

We would prepare like tasks, activities, manuals, but we would definitely choose examples from here and there and offer students an opportunity to read and practice with the idioms.

Furthermore, they both insisted on delivering the lesson of idioms in a contextualised setting, this in turn enables students to gain a better understanding of the expression when used in context. They also introduced idioms using gestures, miming group works and pictures as well.

Q03. Do you think that the time devoted for the lesson is sufficient? Justify.

T2 when answering the previous question referred to the insufficient time, stating that there exist a problem concerning the follow up. As declared ''you get one TD on the idioms and then that is it. Therefore, the thing you do there just stops there. There is no follow up.'' Furthermore, they added that they are restricted with a program, and they have to respect it. As T2 said "there are units, and there is a canva, there is like a program that we have to respect, and we have to be disciplined." In the time being, they both T1 and T2 believe that idioms need more time. They said "I don't think it's enough. I think that every aspect of the language needs extensive exposure for you to let's at least get something of it." Added another

> Developing such a culturally bound competence, like idioms, need an entire semester, probably not one semester, but sequences of semesters in order to develop it. Two sessions, logically speaking, yes are not enough.

Therefore, both teachers proposed that they should just try to familiarise their students with the concept of idioms, theoretically speaking and linguistically speaking, giving some examples, just to open a door for students carry on learning idioms on their own. As claimed by T1

> I usually end up the lesson with an advice for further practice at home. That is the only way to make sure that students would have enough further time to practice idioms outside the classroom.

As for T2, he said

> Dividing the plan into units and providing students at least with an idea to idioms, this is just a door opened, and it's up to you now to hold the beacon yourself and go on being autonomous and independent and learning by yourself.

Q04. What difficulties do students encounter the most when learning and understanding English idioms?

Q05. What are the most frequent strategies used by students in the process of learning and understanding English idioms?

In the two aforementioned questions, teachers were asked to report on what they have noticed regarding the difficulties faced, and the strategies used by their students in learning and understanding English idioms. Teachers' responses regarding the difficulties were dissimilar. While T1 referred first to idioms' equivalents and stated that students tend to over-generalise. Thus, once they come across an expression that has an equivalent in their native language; they think that all idioms have equivalents, which is not always the case. The same goes for literalness, since idioms rarely carry a literal meaning and they are often figurative. T1 is this respect declared that

> If the student makes an effort to decode that figurative aspect of the idiom, he or she may achieve a meaning. But when it comes to this immediate, literal translation, as I said, failure is the immediate result.

In short, it can be said that T1 referred to equivalents of idioms, lack of exposure and use, lack of cultural background, as well as literalness as the main sources of difficulties for EFL students.

 T2, on the other hand, stated that the students' difficulty with idioms is that they do not understand the idiom at all, unless they have some knowledge about the target culture, they have encountered the idiom somewhere, or when they are provided with context. T2 further added that while vocabulary partly contributes to the difficulty of these idiomatic expressions, the major problem is within the relationship between those words. He spoke

> Words in the idiom do not like give an overall sense, you can guess through just one word or two or three but it is up to the native to tell you what it means, right! It is just like a poem or something.

When it comes to the strategies students' use, both teachers seemed to have little to no insights about it, especially that idioms were just a lesson in a unit. For T1 he referred to visual materials (e.g., pictures...), body language as well as context and memorisation. Whereas, T2

believed that students are not aware of any strategies other than Google dictionaries. He also mentioned that students would rely on the context only if they are asked to. As declared "students need to be told what to do. Very few students are really autonomous in the sense that they use other strategies other than the obvious one like phone dictionary." T2 also claimed that students would resort to literal translation when they are challenged with the idiom, especially in the exam when they are devoided of any external help. But again, he insisted that students if they are not pushed to use a certain strategy, they would opt for other strategies as stated previously.

Q06. Last academic year, I noticed that in the lesson of idioms, students are less active compared to other lessons (e.g., phrasal verbs, connotations...), do you agree? If yes, what reason(s) do you attribute to this fact?

Asking this question, teachers showed opposing viewpoints. T1 agreed that students were less active in the lesson of English idioms compared to the other lessons (e.g., phrasal verbs, connotation...). He said,

> I do agree. Part of the phrasal verb is the verb. The verb generally does, even though it changes its meaning when the particle is added. But the verb remains the verb. And students at least have, or at least are familiar with the verb. So some guessing would be possible. You see. But when we talk about idioms, they are newly introduced items.

Meanwhile, T2 disagreed with it. He said "I would definitely not agree to the idea that students were not active just because the idioms were difficult." But he rather attributed that to two main reasons, namely the students' involvement and motivation for learning idioms, as well as the inadequate teaching methods. in this regard, T2 reported that

> We don't have the means to create, let's say, a better atmosphere in class. We don't have data shows. We don't have screens. We don't have anything. So we are just relying on paper, pens, face to face and students get bored. So they are already in a situation where

it is a little bit demotivating. And then you add something which is difficult for them, then their demotivation gets more and more.

These opposing viewpoints could be because T1 is the one responsible for the language mastery module and its lectures as well. Hence, he might have noticed that since he is dealing with a larger number of students, especially that T2 already mentioned that he does not have a recollection of what happened with the other classes.

Q07. Do you think that teaching and learning English idioms should be integrated at an early stage and as an integral part of the English curriculum rather than a lesson in a course at the Master Level, and why?

Teachers' responses to this question went hand in hand, both T1 and T2 encourage earlier and more exposure to idioms. They believe that students should not get exposed to idioms until the master level, but rather from their first year. They also insisted on the idea of integrating idioms within different module like oral expression, written expression, culture and even grammar. T2 declared

I do agree and encourage this idea that early exposure is paramount because the earlier it is the better for the student. I would definitely recommend integrating this in the oral session, as I told you, oral class, written class and grammar; in the sense that you should dedicate a unit for, let's say, structures which are not really grammatically categorized.

Added T1 "teachers need to specify time to integrate some of these items, at least in the form of glossary at the end of each session."

However, even though both teachers emphasised the importance of idioms, both of them encouraged early exposure and more integration, there was some kind of contradiction in T2's claims instead, he stated

If I say more exposure, for what purpose? Because I could see the time and dedicationI use for teaching idioms all that time, I could use it for other more useful stuff, like more

practice on speaking, more practice on listening, more practice on writing other than just focus on idioms.

Moreover, he believed that avoiding and neglecting learning and using idioms would have no effect on EFL students in our context, he further mentioned that his main goal is teaching them only academic English. T1 on the other hand holds another perspective. He declared that

People like to see some aspects of natives in our language. I think the easiest way to impress them is to use some idioms in our conversations and even in writing.

Unlike T2 who pointed out that "you are a foreign language learner, so act like a foreign language learner."

Q11. How do you evaluate your students' idiomatic competence?

Q12. What do you suggest to make the students more competent and comfortable with the use of idioms?

The last two questions were meant to examine the students' idiomatic competence, and some suggestions to encourage students develop such a competence, making them more competent and comfortable with the use of idioms. Regarding the first question, T1 put more emphasis on the fact that students are not homogeneous; therefore, their competencies and efforts differ from one student to another, and even though as he claimed, does not have enough data to judge their level, he noted that students range from average, below the average to good. Whereas T2 although he as well mentioned that he does not have something concrete to build his judgements on; he answered with "the minimum of the minimum, like probably zero."

For the teachers' suggestions to boost their students' idiomatic competence, they both agreed that this could be easily achieved once the students are personally motivated, involved and have that will to learn idioms. T1 in this respect pointed out that "Students now have access to huge learning resources, once the motivation is there, once the intention is there; the exit could be easily found." They

also put emphasis on listening as an effective strategy, especially listening to natives using these expressions. More than that, T1 suggested having a plan for learning idioms, putting more emphasis on consistency. He noted "I think the smart student is the one who set a plan to learn idioms for himself or herself right from the beginning with consistency." T1 further mentioned that learning should be accompanied with a purpose. As reported "if you do not have a purpose in learning any language item, how about idioms you will get lost, and to fail to achieve when you intend to achieve."

Teachers where then asked if they want to add anything; nonetheless, only one of them added a comment saying that

> I liked the fact that some students at least realized that there are other important things in research than teaching for example skills alone. Now, opening or leading the way to idiomatic expressions would probably guide others to follow and make more research.

This is in contrast to what T2 claimed previously, that more exposure to the four skills is more beneficial than exposing students to idioms

3.3 Discussion and Synthesis of the Results

The present study was an attempt to explore and examine the common difficulties encountered by EFL students; in addition to the students' implemented strategies in working out the meaning of idiomatic expressions by both, first- and second-year master students at the department of English in Biskra University. This exploratory study, following the case study design, also aimed at examining the teachers' teaching methods implicitly. The study exploited two data collection instruments, namely the students' questionnaire, and the teachers' interview. The data of both instruments aimed to answer all of the three research questions that were raised at the very beginning, so that a comparison between the students and the teachers' responses could be easily achieved. The answers of the three research questions, as well as the corresponding hypotheses will be discussed in accordance to the findings obtained from the data analysis.

The first research question sought to highlight the main challenges that impeded students from effectively learning and understanding English idioms. This question was answered through the questionnaire that was adopted from Al-Khawaldeh et al. (2016). Students were introduced to a number of difficulties in the form of statements and had to answer to which extent they agree or disagree with each of them. The findings revealed that students suffer from many difficulties with varying proportions. The lack of cultural background seemed to be on the top of difficulties, followed by lack of exposure, the absence of context and the literal translation, equally. The teaching method, as well as idioms being delivered only as a simple lesson were among the difficulties. In the meantime, the vocabulary of idioms presented a minor difficulty to students.

This question was also asked to teachers during the interview, teachers' answers were close to those of students. Nonetheless, it was also pointed to equivalents of idioms by one of the teachers; however, this appeared to be a strategy more than a difficulty. This in turn answers research question number one and confirms hypothesis number one that students suffer from many difficulties, among them the lack of cultural background, the lack of exposure and the absence of context.

In the second research question, we aimed to look at the strategies implemented by students when dealing with English idiomatic expressions. Similarly, this question was answered through the questionnaire which was adopted from Al-Khawaldeh et al. (2016). Students were presented with five strategies in the form of statements on a 5-point Likert scale. It was revealed that students opt for a variety of strategies in order to learn and understand idioms. Relying on the context was the most used strategy; this goes in line with other researchers' findings Alhaysony (2017), Al-khawaldeh et al. (2016), Cooper (1999). Students also relied on visual and verbal information to a certain degree, followed by looking for equivalents of idioms in their native language and memorisation. Although students relied as

well on literal translation, they did not use it that much. This could be attributed to the students' high awareness of the figurative nature of idioms; thus, they are conscious that literal translation could lead to the failure of their interpretations.

In the teachers' interview, when answering this question; the two teachers did not agree upon the same strategies. T1 seemed more aware and conscious about his students more than the other teacher. He referred to the same strategies students heavily relied on, namely visual materials, context and memorisation; he further mentioned the use of body language. In the meantime, T2 claimed that the students rely on the easiest way which is the online dictionaries, unless they are prevented from that, and are pushed to utilise other strategies like the context. This way we answer research question number two and confirm the second hypothesis which suggests that students opt for a variety of strategies, namely relying on the context, finding equivalents and memorisation.

For the third research question, the ultimate goal was examining whether the way idioms are delivered in the classroom contribute to their learning' difficulty. This question was answered through both the questionnaire, and the interview. Almost half of the students agreed that idioms were not taught well, especially that idioms were introduced only as a simple single lesson in the language mastery course. This question was further developed in the last section of the questionnaire where they had the freedom to report on their satisfaction and dissatisfaction about the course delivery. Almost all of students expressed their dissatisfaction in terms of the inadequate teaching methods, as well as the insufficient time given to such a complicated aspect of language.

Teachers' teaching methods on the other side were implicitly examined during the interview. Both teachers went in line with their students' viewpoints regarding the teaching method and the time devoted. Teachers were aware of the inadequate teaching methods and the lack of teaching materials which represent an important and an effective tool in raising the

students' motivation and involvement; thus, boosting their language learning in general, and idiomatic competence in particular. Consequently, this answers research question number three, and therefore confirms hypothesis number three that the way idioms are taught contribute to their learning' difficulty.

Besides the questions that aimed at answering the main three research questions of the present study, there were other questions related to the students' use and perceptions about English idioms. The goal was to gain more insights about the students' use of these idiomatic expressions, as well as their perceptions regarding their importance for them as EFL students. This in turn helped to reveal that although students very seldom use English idioms, they are indeed aware of their importance as one of the main important aspects of the English language assisting them to sound more natural, more fluent and more native-like.

In short, the findings of this study answered all of the research questions and confirmed all of three corresponding hypotheses that we aimed at answering at first. It was further revealed that both teachers and students at the department of English in Biskra University are conscious of the importance of English idioms for EFL students. Therefore, more emphasis should be put in teaching and learning these lexical units, formulaic language in general, and idioms specifically; which in turn ensures developing the students' vocabulary learning, fluency; and therefore, their overall English proficiency level.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview about the methodology of the current research, the choices and the rationale. Therefore, it pointed to the research paradigms, approaches and designs. It also highlighted the data collection methods, their aim and structure, their piloting and validation phase; in addition to the data collection and analysis procedures; it further

discussed the sampling technique. Moreover, the chapter analysed and interpreted the findings

obtained from each data collection tool. The findings where then discussed and synthesised.

General Conclusion

EFL students often suffer when they deal with English idioms; however, the latter cannot actually be avoided nor neglected, as it is widely used by natives in their discourse being it spoken or written. It is for this reason that we aimed at highlighting the difficulties, as well as the strategies used in the process of learning and understanding English idiomatic expressions, and implicitly examining the adopted teaching method.

In order to accomplish the practical part of this research work, a sample of 20 master students, including first- and second-year students were selected through the convenience sampling technique, in addition to two teachers in charge of the language mastery class at the department of English in Biskra University. Moreover, the adopted philosophical framework for the current study was the constructivist paradigm. Additionally, the design opted for was the case study design due to its compatibility with the exploratory nature of the research work, the raised research questions, as well as the objectives we aimed to reach.

In an attempt to answer the three research questions that were raised at the very beginning, and which are respectively as follow: What are the difficulties encountered by EFL students in learning English idioms? What are the strategies used by EFL students in the process of learning idioms? Does the way idioms are taught contribute to their learning' difficulty? Two data collection methods were utilised. These include: a semi-structured questionnaire with students, and a semi-structured interview with the teachers responsible for the language mastery course. The obtained data were then analysed, interpreted and displayed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis.

The results reached from the data collection demonstrated that students encountered different difficulties when dealing with idioms, the common ones were the lack of cultural background, the lack of exposure, the absence of context, the literal translation, as well as the

inappropriate teaching methods in addition to the unvaried authentic materials. Furthermore, it was also revealed that students attempted to use a variety of strategies in the process of learning idioms. Students mostly relied on the context, made use of visual and verbal information, looked for equivalents in their L1, and relied on memorisation.

Moreover, the interview's results almost aligned with data obtained from the questionnaire; and hence, the two first hypotheses were confirmed. These hypotheses were: **1.** EFL students face many difficulties when learning idioms. Some of them are: lack of exposure to idioms, lack of cultural background and the absence of context. **2.** There is a variety of strategies used by EFL students in learning idioms, mainly to facilitate the process namely: relying on the context, memorisation and finding equivalents in L1.

The results of both the questionnaire and the interview further revealed inadequate teaching methods, in addition to the unavailability of appropriate authentic materials. This in turn explained the students' dissatisfaction with the way idioms were delivered in class; and therefore, confirmed research hypothesis number three. **3.** The way in which idioms are taught makes idioms a difficult task to undertake.

The findings of the current research work could be of great significance to the field of English language teaching. More precisely, it helps syllabus designers to pay more attention to the teaching of English idiomatic expressions, gradually integrating them to familiarise students with the concept of idioms; more importantly, integrating them in a way that correspond the students' needs and level of English.

Implications and Recommendations

In accordance with the findings obtained from this research work, a number of recommendations can be drawn for more effective teaching/ learning of formulaic language, and idioms precisely. The latter needs more emphasis and further considerations, especially,

in the Algerian EFL context in the department of English at Biskra University mainly to smooth the learning process of these complex lexical items.

- More focus should be given to English idiomatic expressions in the EFL context due to their benefits for non-native speakers of English, in terms of vocabulary acquisition, speech fluency, native-like soundness and overall language proficiency.

- More and earlier exposure to English idioms right from the students' first year and not until reaching the Mater level, in order to familiarise students with the concept of idioms.

- Gradually integrate idioms in way that corresponds to the students' level, from level A, beginners until reaching advanced levels.

- Integrating idioms in different modules, like grammar, written expression, oral expression, culture and civilisation and others.

- Teachers should opt for a variety of teaching methods and styles in order to raise the students' motivation and involvement.

- Teachers should make use of authentic audio-visual materials that facilitate and enhance the learning process of idioms, as well as raising the students' engagement in the classroom.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

As any research work, we faced some difficulties while conducting the current study. These difficulties were mainly due to time constraints, unavailability of participants, as well as the lack of resources.

The main issue we suffered from was the limitation of time, as we were supposed to write a whole master dissertation in one semester which was something totally new for all of us. Additionally, in the process of collecting data, the questionnaire was designed twice; and we were waiting for the students' responses, and this in turn made its analysis late. Moreover,

there was a lack of resources regarding the second variable in this study "Difficulties of Idioms to EFL students", as most research works focused on idioms in isolation and paid little attention to the EFL students' challenges when dealing with these expressions.

A last comment for future researchers is to include a larger sample in order to have more insights and different perspectives from students. It is also suggested to test the students' idiomatic competence at first, and then choose one of the most effective strategies, apply it and check if it boosts the students' idiomatic level and minimises their difficulties or not.

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e=bl&ots=I9Nisqv0Mt&sig=ACfU3U3OHvIGxx9cfoq3ux3GNzywYdYi8g&hl=fr&s

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%20which%20have%20to%20be%20learned%20as%20a%20whole%2C%20along%2

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Appendices

Appendix A: The Students' Questionnaire

Students' Questionnaire

Dear Master students,

You are kindly requested to provide real answers to the following questions, which in turn aim to examine and highlight **''The Common Difficulties Encountered by English as a Foreign Language Learners in Learning English Idioms.''** Please, make sure to read the questions carefully, and respond accordingly. Be certain that your answers will trustworthily be kept confidential, private and anonymous and will be used only for academic purposes.

An idiom is ''a figurative expression that usually can be interpreted literally but that takes a non-literal meaning when used in a specific context'' (Cain, Oakhil & Lemmon, 2005, p. 66).

Examples: Break a leg   Break the ice   Kick the bucket

Section one: The Students' Authorisation

The present consent letter is designed for Master students of English at Biskra University in order to ensure your approval to be part of our research study. Therefore, you are kindly invited to answer this questionnaire. Be sure that your answers will be treated in the strict confidence.

I consent to volunteer in this questionnaire.   Yes ☐   No ☐

Section Two: Students' Use and Perceptions of English Idiomatic Expressions

You are kindly asked to tick to which extent you agree or disagree with each statement.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree

The Students' Use and Perceptions of Idiomatic Expressions	1	2	3	4	5

	1	2	3	4	5
1. I am very active when the lesson of idioms is delivered in the classroom.					
2. I often use English idioms.					
3. I like to use English idioms when speaking.					
4. I like to use English idioms in writing.					
5. I use English idioms only inside the classroom.					
6. I use English idioms even outside the classroom.					

Q07. In your opinion, are idiomatic expressions necessary to be learnt and taught?

Yes ☐   No ☐

Why? ....

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Q08. What do you think regarding the importance of learning English idioms as an EFL

student?

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Section Three: **The Students' Difficulties in Learning and Understanding English Idioms**

You are kindly asked to tick to which extent you agree or disagree with each statement.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

Difficulties of Learning and Understanding English Idioms	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

1. Idioms are difficult because of the lack of cultural background					
2. Idioms are difficult because of the lack of exposure to them					
3. Idioms are difficult because they are not taught well in class					
4. Idioms are difficult because they are presented only as a simple lesson in the language mastery course					
5. Idioms are difficult because of their vocabulary					
6. Idioms are difficult when there is no context					
7. Idioms are difficult when they are processed independently (word by word translation)					

Q08. Can you mention any other difficulties?

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Section Four: The Students' Strategies in Learning and Understanding English Idioms

You are kindly asked to tick the answer that best describes you.

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always

Strategies of Learning and Understanding English Idioms	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

1. I use literal translation in order to understand the meaning of idioms					
2. I look for equivalents of idioms in my native language					
3. I rely on the context					
4. I learn idioms through memorisation					
5. I rely on verbal and visual information					

Q06. Can you mention other strategies that you usually use and are not included?

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Section Five: **The Students' Satisfaction or Dissatisfaction about the Course Delivery**

Q01. Are you satisfied with the way idioms are delivered in the classroom?

Yes ☐   No ☐

Why?...

....

....

Q02. Do you think that the time devoted for the lesson is sufficient?

Yes ☐   No ☐

Q03. How would you like idiomatic expressions to be taught?

....

....

....

Q04. If there is anything you want to add, please feel free.

....

Thank you for your time and collaboration!

Appendix B: The Opinionnaire for the Questionnaire

The Opinionnaire

1. Are there any repetitive questions?

Yes ☐   No ☐

- If yes, please specify them.

....

2. Did you find any grammar/spelling mistakes in the questions?

Yes ☐   No ☐

- If yes, please notify them below.

....……

....……

3. Are there any irrelevant questions that need to be removed?

Yes ☐   No ☐

- If yes, please provide the number of the question(s) below.

....

....

4. Is the questionnaire of reasonable length?

Yes ☐   No ☐

5. Are there any ambiguous questions that need to be reformulated and / or clarified? If yes, please indicate which questions require rewording.

Yes ☐   No ☐

6. If there are any questions that you believe are of close relevance to the purpose of the questionnaire but were not included, please write them below.

The Expert's Report

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Thank you very much for your time and collaboration!

Appendix C: The Teachers' Interview Questions

The Teachers' Interview Guide

Section one: General Knowledge

Q01. How long have you been teaching English at University?

Q02. How long have you been teaching the Language Mastery Course?

Section Two: Idioms Instruction in the Classroom

Q03. Since idioms take part in the language mastery course syllabus, what do you think regarding the importance of learning/ teaching idioms for EFL students?

Q04. Do you adopt a specific teaching method while delivering the lesson of idioms?

Q05. Do you think that the time devoted for the lesson is sufficient? Justify.

Q06. What difficulties do students encounter the most when learning and understanding English idioms?

Q07. In your opinion, what are the most frequent strategies used by students in the process of learning and understanding English idioms?

Q08. Last academic year, I noticed that in the lesson of idioms, students are less active compared to other lessons (e.g. phrasal verbs, connotations...), do you agree? If yes, what reason(s) do you attribute to this fact?

Q09. Do you think that teaching and learning English idioms should be integrated at an early stage and as an integral part of the English curriculum rather than a lesson in a course at the Master Level, and why?

Q10. How do you evaluate your students' idiomatic competence?

Q11. What do you suggest to make the students more competent and comfortable with the use of idioms?

Q12. Is there anything you want to add?

Thank you for your time and collaboration!

Appendix D: The Opinionnaire for the Interview

The Opinionnaire

1. Are there any repetitive questions?

        Yes ☐   No ☐

- If yes, please specify them.

………………………………………………………………………………................…

… …………………………………………………………………………….....….……

2. Did you find any grammar/spelling mistakes in the questions?

        Yes ☐   No ☐

- If yes, please notify them below.

 ………………………………………………………………………………….....….……

………………………………………………………………………………….......….……

3. Are there any irrelevant questions that need to be removed?

        Yes ☐   No ☐

- If yes, please provide the number of the question(s) below.

.………………………………………………………………………….............…

… …………………………………………………………………………………….…

4. Is the interview of reasonable length?

Yes ☐   No ☐

5. Are there any ambiguous questions that need to be reformulated and / or clarified? If yes, please indicate which questions require rewording.

Yes ☐ No ☐

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6. If there are any questions that you believe are of close relevance to the purpose of the interview but were not included, please write them below.

…………………………I…………………………………………………...........……

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The Expert's Report

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Thank you very much for your time and collaboration!